

MY ESSAYS: VOL. VI

Alton C. Thompson

$55 + 61 + 64 + 78 + 69 + 73 = 400$ Essays

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Tvedestrand, Norway: My father's father's father's father (Torje Tjøstolvsen Solberg) came from this area, having emigrated in 1853, preceded by son Tjøstolv in 1848. It is reputed (although I possess no hard evidence in support of this claim) that Torje, in departing Norway, paid for the passage of *60 people* in addition to the members of his own family! What a man to have in one's family tree!

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Cold Winters and Global Warming

Alton C. Thompson

A significant portion of the United States has been experiencing extreme cold (with some areas also experiencing an abnormal amount of snow) this winter (while, ironically, the Olympic games in Sochi, Russia, have been affected by unusually warm weather and fog!). I suspect that someone like Cong. [Marsha Blackburn](#), the Republican from Tennessee who [recently “debated”](#) “science guy” [William Nye](#)) would argue that this proves that global warming is a hoax. Such an argument fails to recognize, however, that for one thing the very term “global warming” is somewhat of a misnomer.

What is basically involved with “global warming” is more and more of the long-wave heat energy being “trapped” in the lower atmosphere as we humans have been adding “[greenhouse gases](#)” to the atmosphere—through both our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation. This “trapping” of heat energy has, of course, had as an effect an increase in the global mean temperature (about 0.8° C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution—i.e., c1750 CE), but that has not been the *only* effect. In addition, other important effects have been:

- An increase in the *number* of storms.
- An increase in their *magnitude*—i.e., the area that they affect.
- An increase in their *severity*.
- An increase in weather *variability*—more so in some areas than others, of course—such that weather conditions are becoming increasingly difficult to *predict* and, therefore, *plan* for—especially from the standpoint of several months into the future.

What we are experiencing is what might be termed “declimatization,” in that the word “climate” is increasingly referring to something that is becoming non-existent—i.e., fading away like the [Cheshire cat](#)’s [smile](#). Because “global warming” is a term that misleads many as to what it involves, I have suggested “[Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization](#)” (TAD) as a substitute, recognizing, however, that that term is a tad cumbersome!

Given the fourth of my four points above, one should not be surprised that a climate scientist might argue that the current winter is what one should expect, given that global warming is occurring.

There is, however, a more *precise* explanation for the characteristics of this winter, one that does not argue from the standpoint of *weather variability*. Here is some [recent “bad news”](#) for those of us living in the northern part of the United States (such as Wisconsin, where I live):

As a result of steadily climbing Arctic temperatures, the polar jet stream has been thrown off its usual course, setting off wild weather patterns such as the extremely harsh winter in the Northern and Eastern U.S. this year. This chilly reality is likely to become the new norm, a group of U.S. scientists [said at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science](#) on Saturday.

Those of us who listen to weather reports (to guide our behavior that day or the next) have heard weather reporters explain the recent severe weather by referring to the path of the jet stream. What they have failed to add, however, is that the *reason* for the jet stream’s unusual path is that the Arctic is warming—and is warming because of global warming.

The “bad news” regarding that fact is that although most of us would like to think that the current winter has been somewhat of a “freak”—and it *has* been relative to the recent past—this may become the “new normal” given the expectation, by climate scientists, that the Arctic will *continue* to warm.

For those of us living in the northern (and eastern) United States, life will become increasingly difficult. But not only during the winter, but during the summer as well—for the freezing of Lake Superior (north of Wisconsin) may mean that [this summer will be cooler](#), and that the trend may be for *both* colder winters *and* cooler summers for this part of the country.

If this occurs, it will be truly ironic: While global warming is occurring from a *global* standpoint, one of the most “advanced” areas of the world—the portion of the world most *responsible* for the global warming that has been occurring!—may begin to experience both colder winters *and* cooler summers!

We may be able to use *less* electricity during summers for air conditioning (thereby contributing less to global warming), but use *more* electricity/natural gas, etc., during winters for heating—thereby contributing even *more* to global warming! A real losing proposition! In addition, with more snow removal being required, the operation of snow removal equipment will involve the emission of greenhouse gases, *further* contributing to the global warming problem!

Those of us living in, e.g., Wisconsin might welcome the prospect of cooler summers, but we need to keep in mind that cooler summers, combined with more storminess, is likely to mean that the growing of plant foods will become increasingly problematic, with rising prices for food being the result—and some farmers being forced into bankruptcy. In addition, there are likely to be numerous additional “negatives” that I haven’t mentioned!

I think I’ll have a beer—or two!

The Importance of the Environment

Alton C. Thompson

“Environment” is a human-oriented term that refers to what surrounds *us* as humans. Often a distinction is made between “physical” and “human” environments, with the former referring to the non-human life, and the naturally-occurring inanimate things (e.g., rocks, rock formations, waterfalls, etc.) around us, and the latter referring to other nearby humans, along with the things (buildings, roads, consumer products, etc.) that have been created/built by humans. All living things—including humans—both *influence* their environment and, in turn, are *influenced by* their environment.

In many of my previous essays I have focused on our influence on our physical environment (via our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation activities), and the impact of that influence on us [1] (a sort of “rebound effect,” one might say): The global warming resulting from some of our activities, and the relevance of that global warming for our lives. What needs to be recognized, however, is that even if our activities had *no* influence on our environment, our environment would still impact us in various ways. It is *that* fact which I wish to focus on in the present essay.

Given that my educational background has emphasized Geography, a useful starting point here is to note that the idea of [environmental—or geographical—determinism](#) has been with us for centuries, going back at least to (ancient Greeks) [Hippocrates](#) and [Strabo](#), and Afro-Arab writer [al-Jahiz](#). In more recent times [Ellen Churchill Semple](#) and [Ellsworth Huntington](#) have been proponents of this “philosophy.” “Weaker” versions of determinism have also been promoted, including “[probabilism](#)” (associated with, e.g., [Paul Vidal de la Blache](#)) and “[possibilism](#)” (associated with, e.g., cultural ecologist [Marshall Sahlins](#)).

To argue that human characteristics and actions are determined—“controlled”—by the physical environment is, of course, to argue an extreme position. And students exposed to this argument—who also took courses in microeconomics—must have had difficulty avoiding becoming schizophrenic (!), given that the latter taught that (a) only human decisions involving economic matters had significance, (b) with those decisions being affected not at all by the physical environment, being, rather, rational decisions involving free choice. And if a student took Psychology courses in addition—learning therein that the unconscious controls our behavior—s/he must have become *thoroughly* confused, perhaps to the point of needing to be committed! Given environmental determinism’s rigidity, it is not surprising, then, that it gave way to “weaker” versions of influence, such as probabilism and possibilism.

Between 1920 and 1940 environmental determinism began to give way to “weaker” views of environmental influence not only because of its extremism, however, but because of its seeming support of both racism and imperialism—and attacks on the discipline of Geography for that reason. By the time I had begun my study of Geography “[central place theory](#)” (introduced by German geographer [Walter Christaller](#) in 1933, and further developed by German economist [August Lösch](#)) had become the “thing.” (The “big gun” in Human Geography at that time was [Brian J. L. Berry](#), at the University of Chicago. [2]) I was drawn to this theory because of its geometric character (Geometry having been my favorite mathematics subject in secondary school) and its dependence on Microeconomics (whose logical quality had attracted me as a college student).

With central place theory the physical environment is something that is just “there”—the place where human activities take place, having no influence worth mentioning on those activities—with economic “laws” now being the determining (ironic, right?!) factors in settlement patterns. Then later, after Communication Studies professor [Everett M. Rogers](#) published (1962) his [Diffusion of Innovations](#), geographers—recognizing that diffusion has not only a temporal dimension, but a spatial one as well—became interested in the diffusion of things and ideas through space, but again thought of space as something that was just “there.” ([Torsten Hägerstrand](#) and [Allan Pred](#) are examples of geographers who did important work in this area.)

I have been away from the discipline of Geography since 1976, and assume that it has adopted a more balanced perspective on environmental influence. To an important degree, however, it appears to me that having been “burned” in the past by an over-emphasis on environmental influences, they have allowed psychologists to take over their former interest in this matter. At any rate, there are such books with a psychological orientation as Winifred Gallagher’s [The Power of Place: How Our Surroundings Shape Our Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions](#) (2007), and texts such as [Environmental Psychology: An Introduction](#), by Linda Steg et al. (2012) and Dak Kopec’s [Environmental Psychology for Design](#) (2012).

Kopec’s book indicates that Environmental Psychology has not only developed a “scholarly” orientation—i.e., one committed to discovering “truths” about how the environment affects people—but a *normative* orientation as well. In fact, it [has been said](#) of Environmental Psychology:

Since its conception, the field has been committed to the development of a discipline that is both value oriented and problem oriented, prioritizing research aiming at solving complex [environmental problems](#) in the pursuit of individual [well-being within a larger society](#).^[1] When solving problems involving human-environment interactions, whether global or local, one must have a model of human nature that predicts the environmental conditions under which humans will [behave](#) in a decent and creative manner. With such a model one can design, manage, protect and/or restore environments that enhance reasonable behavior, predict what the likely outcome will be when these conditions are not met, and diagnose problem situations. The field develops such a model of human nature while retaining a broad and inherently multidisciplinary

focus. It explores such dissimilar issues as [common property resource management](#), [wayfinding](#) in complex settings, the effect of [environmental stress](#) on human performance, the characteristics of [restorative environments](#), human information processing, and the promotion of durable conservation behavior.

A recent example of a study that focuses on the relevance of the environment for humans is one [undertaken by a research team](#) at the University of Exeter Medical School. This study, using data from over 1,000 participants, and based on the [British Household Panel Survey](#), differed from previous studies in that it focused on two groups of people, members of each group having changed their residential location. The two groups: Those who had moved to urban areas that were “greener” than the place of origin, and those who relocated to *less* green areas. The study had these two basic findings:

- On average, “movers to greener areas experienced an immediate improvement in mental health that was sustained for at least 3 years after they moved.”
- People who had relocated to “a more built up area suffered a drop in mental health. Interestingly this fall occurred *before* they moved; returning to normal once the move was complete.”

Although the lead researcher stated that “We’ve shown that individuals who move to greener areas have significant and long-lasting improvements in mental health,” the second finding reported above is somewhat ambiguous in what it suggests: In not specifying level of mental health before a move occurred, it’s difficult to know whether the “return to normal” was, or was not, a return to an “adequate” level of mental health.

Still, the literature in the field of Environmental Psychology provides an abundance of evidence to the effect that, *ceteris paribus*, people will enjoy better mental health when living in green surroundings than when living in compact built-up areas lacking in greenery. If one develops good social relationships while living in a compact built-up area, this may help compensate for a lack of greenery in one’s environment. But by living in an area with greenery in which one has *also* developed good social relationships, one can improve one’s mental health even more.

Although studies such as the above-mentioned one are of value, they tend to suffer from the narrowness that typifies academic research. The value that the researchers involved in this report perceive is very narrow in scope: These studies, states lead researcher Dr. Ian Alcock, “are important for urban planners thinking about introducing new green spaces to our towns and cities, suggesting they could provide long term and sustained benefits for local communities.”

What these researchers fail to realize, seemingly, is that global warming is starting to have important effects (including the recent [flooding of the Thames](#)!), with potential severe consequences for urban areas: The rise in sea level causing relocation from cities near the ocean,

and massive mortality in cities as food becomes difficult to obtain, disease becomes rampant, and violence takes over cities, especially after the “tipping point” is reached, and crossed.

Still, research in Environmental Psychology can be of value to those who become aware of the threat posed by global warming, who therefore begin engaging in pre-adaptive activities—and in doing so are interested not only in *surviving* (insofar as that’s possible) the ravages of global warming, but in having a life that addresses their innate (psychological and physical) needs as humans. Insofar as such individuals are interested in the latter—and they certainly *should* be!—they will find research findings by environmental psychologists of considerable value. [3]

Endnotes

1. An important feature of global warming is that the people in those parts of the world most responsible for the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation—and, thereby, global warming—are not the only people *affected* by global warming. In fact, the *effects* of global warming are felt throughout the world, even in those areas where the residents *bear no responsibility whatsoever* for the phenomenon (*set* of phenomena, actually)! Although the effects of global warming vary, and *will* vary, in severity from place to place, a fundamental feature of global warming is its *utter unfairness*, given the lack of a strong correlation between (a) the *severity* of effects and (b) the *degree* of responsibility.
2. I was not aware of this fact when, as a college student, I began to think about graduate school. In fact, the only reason that I thought about graduate school at all was that when I was a senior, because I had minored in Geology, and had taken an introductory course in Geography, the chairman of the former department informed me that the following year a new position was opening, Faculty Assistant in Geology and Geography, for handling laboratories in both departments. He asked me if I would be interested in the position, and I said that I would. During the following year one day the chairman of the Geography department approached me with a “flyer” for the University of North Carolina, and suggested that I apply for an Assistantship in Geography there so that I could earn a M.A. in Geography there. I applied, was accepted—and that’s the only reason I ended up in graduate school!

It’s interesting how chance events can have such an important (“determining?!”) influence on one’s life! In fact, it while I was in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, that I met my wife—who was from Richland Center, Wisconsin! We met because my future brother-in-law was attending UNC in Chemistry at that time, his wife urged her sister (my future wife) to leave her job in Madison, Wisconsin, for a job in Chapel Hill, she did, getting a job with the Institute of Government there, being paired with the wife of the man who became my best friend there. When his wife learned that we were both from Wisconsin, she thought we should get together, which we did eventually—fell in love, and got married! That was almost 48 years ago!

3. [Ebenezer Howard](#) was aware of the importance of greenery, as evidenced by his “[Garden Cities of To-morrow](#)” (1898), the description of a [utopian](#) city in which people live harmoniously together with nature.” That publication “resulted in the founding of the [garden city movement](#)”

The Addiction Problem: A Reason for Hope?

Alton C. Thompson

Addiction

is the continued repetition of a behavior despite adverse consequences,^[1] or a neurological impairment leading to such behaviors.^[2]

Addictions can include, but are not limited to, [drug abuse](#), [exercise addiction](#), [food addiction](#), [computer addiction](#) and [gambling](#). Classic hallmarks of addiction include impaired control over substances or behavior, preoccupation with substance or behavior, continued use despite consequences, and denial.^[3] Habits and patterns associated with addiction are typically characterized by immediate gratification (short-term reward), coupled with delayed deleterious effects (long-term costs).^[4]

The problem of addiction is usually thought of in terms of alcohol and drug abuse, but the most important—by far!—form of addiction today is that to fossil fuel use. One question that arises here, however, is: *Who* are the addicts in this case?

Virtually everyone who lives in, e.g., the United States is either a direct or indirect *user* of fossil fuels, but does that fact mean that we are all *addicted* to their use? My answer to that question is a resounding “No”! The reason I say this is that virtually all of us are “trapped” in a way of life that is dependent upon fossil fuel usage. That is, most of us are direct/indirect users of fossil fuels because *we have no choice*. Our society has developed in response to the discovery of coal, and then petroleum, as sources of energy, and *most of us have had no responsibility whatsoever for those developments*. Therefore, most of us lack *culpability*, so far as why fossil fuels “power” our society.

Those who direct the operations of energy companies have the resources to switch to the production of “safe” energy. Mark Z. Jacobson and Mark A. Delucchi, in a 2009 [Scientific American](#) article, claimed that current knowledge is such that it is possible for *all* of the world’s energy needs to be provided with (“safe”) renewables. You and I don’t have the wherewithal to implement their “plan,” but those who direct the operations of our energy companies do—so that the fact that they *haven’t* implemented the Jacobson-Delucchi plan means that it is *those individuals* (in this country, and their counterparts elsewhere) who bear the primary responsibility for our use of fossil fuels, and the global warming thereby caused.

That fact of where the primary responsibility lies has significance not only, however, in that it enables us to “point our fingers” at these people, but because there is a basis for attributing their behavior to an *addiction*. *Why* is that possibility of importance?

The first point to keep in mind here is that *addictive behavior* is a sort of behavior in which one is “driven” to engage in certain behaviors: One engages in certain behaviors not because one makes a conscious (and rational—an economist would add) *choice* so to do but, rather, because *psychological mechanisms* with which one is “equipped,” and which “operate” on an unconscious level, *cause* one to do so.

If we think of the moguls of the energy industry as *consciously* deciding to continue their extractive efforts relative to fossil fuels, we are forced to think of them as moral monsters—given the negative (and potentially *disastrously* so) *effects* associated with the burning of fossil fuels.

If, however, we think of them as being *addicted* to that activity, not only can our view of these individuals “soften.” This perception of these individuals can give us hope! Let me explain why.

A primary feature of the addict is that he is in *denial* (even if not living in Egypt! [1]). [Denial](#) is

a [psychological defense mechanism](#) postulated by [Sigmund Freud](#), in which a person is faced with a fact that is too uncomfortable to accept and rejects it instead, insisting that it is not true despite what may be overwhelming [evidence](#).^{[2][3]}

And this:

Many contemporary psychoanalysts treat denial as the first stage of a coping cycle. When an unwelcome change occurs, a trauma of some sort, the first impulse to disbelieve begins the process of coping. That denial, in a healthy mind, slowly rises to greater consciousness. Gradually becoming a subconscious pressure, just beneath the surface of overt awareness, the mechanism of coping then involves repression, while the person accumulates the emotional resources to fully face the trauma.

That is, an individual who is in a state of denial tends *not*—if s/he has a “healthy mind,” that is—to get “stuck” in that state. Rather, psychological processes occur, automatically, in the individual’s unconscious mind, such that the initial denial “evolves” (one might say) into repression. And while the individual is in *that* stage, the coping mechanisms operating—below the level of consciousness—in the individual’s mind work to develop the “emotional resources” that will allow the individual finally to face the truth, and then act on that truth—in an *appropriate* manner, one hopes! There is, that is, such a phenomenon as “[bottoming out](#).”

It is, I’m convinced, reasonable to believe that the primary decision-makers in the energy industry have—*most* of them, at any rate—“healthy minds.” Second, I think it reasonable to believe that they have been exposed to the (bad!) “news” that global warming is occurring. Granted that they have *also* likely been exposed to the pronouncements of “climate change deniers” (such as Rep. [Marsha Blackburn](#)); I would like to think, however, that they would recognize such individuals as of lesser intelligence and education than themselves, so that their

unconscious minds, at least, would recognize “deniers” as individuals who should not be listened to (forever).

The “addiction model,” then, gives us some basis for hope that at some point in the future—before it is too late, one hopes!—the primary decision-makers in the fossil fuel industry will “[come to their senses](#).” *If* this happens, they will then (one hopes!) use their wealth and power not only to cease producing fossil fuels, but to initiate a rapid switchover to “safe” sources of energy. Seumas Milne, in commenting recently on denialism, [stated](#):

There's certainly a strong tendency, especially in the US, for [conservative white men to refuse to accept \[the fact that\] climate change](#) is caused by human beings. But there shouldn't be any inherent reason why people who believe in social hierarchies, individualism and inequality should care less about the threat of floods, drought, starvation and mass migrations than anyone else. After all, rightwing people have children too.

What this statement suggests is that if the coping mechanisms associated specifically with *denialism* don't work to cause these decision-makers to “[wake up and smell the roses](#),” perhaps the fact that they *have children* will be decisive. After all, how can any responsible parent—regardless of income—not want to have their children not only *have* a future, but have a *decent* one?!

Perhaps I am merely “[grasping at straws](#),” but as long as I have “[life and breath](#),” I will continue to have some measure of hope that our “salvation,” as a species, is in the realm of possibility.

Endnote

1. I'm sorry, but I just couldn't resist saying that!

The United States Executive: Two Meanings!

Alton C. Thompson

[Article Two](#) of the U. S. Constitution states: “The [executive](#) Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.” The function of the executive power—as the very name suggests—is “to execute the instructions of Congress, which has the exclusive power to make laws”

In addition, Clause 1 states: “The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States”

Clause 2 states that the President “shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Law: but the Congress may by Law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the Courts of Law, or in the Heads of Departments.

And, finally, Clause 3 gives the President the “Power to fill up all Vacancies that may happen during the Recess of the Senate, by granting Commissions which shall expire at the End of their next Session.”

Of these “Powers” those granted in Clause 1 are clearly the most important; it is perhaps not surprising, then, that they tempt presidents to abuse this Power. Although

[Article One](#) [of the Constitution] gives Congress and not the President the exclusive right to [declare war](#). Nevertheless, the power of the president to initiate hostilities has been subject to question. According to historian [Thomas Woods](#), “Ever since the [Korean War](#), Article II, Section 2 [...] has been interpreted ‘The president has the power to initiate hostilities without consulting Congress’ [...] But what the framers actually meant by that clause was that once war has been declared, it was the President’s responsibility as commander-in-chief to direct the war. Alexander Hamilton spoke in such terms when he said that the president, although lacking the power to declare war, would have “the direction of war when authorized or begun.” The president acting alone was authorized only to repel sudden attacks (hence the decision to withhold from him only the power to “declare” war, not to “make” war, which was thought to be a necessary emergency power in case of foreign attack). ^{[6][7]} Since [World War II](#), every major military action has been technically a U.S. military operation or a U.N. “[police action](#)”, which are

deemed legally legitimate by Congress, and various [United Nations Resolutions](#) because of decisions such as the [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution](#) or the [The Resolution of The Congress Providing Authorization for Use of Force In Iraq](#).

That is, the writers of the Constitution recognized that if the United States—in the sense of *territory* considered to be a part of the United States—were to be attacked by some foreign power, there was a need for an *immediate* response. In such a case, because only the President was capable of such a response, the Constitution granted the occupant of the Executive Office the right—indeed, the *responsibility*—to respond to such an attack.

If, on the other hand, a (possible) reason arose for military action against *another country*, Congress clearly gave the authority for that decision to the U. S. Congress, a “body” comprised of two separate groups, a House of Representatives and a Senate. Given a body such as the House—comprised, as it is, of *numerous* members (that number having increased over time since the country’s origin)—that body can be expected to have difficulty making decisions, because of the varying viewpoints possessed by its members. The U. S. Congress—composed of *two* bodies—can be expected to have even more difficulty reaching decisions, of course.

Implicit, then, in the fact that *Congress* was given the sole right to declare war is the idea that such a declaration—because of its utter seriousness—needs *careful consideration*, the sort of consideration that only a *group* can provide.

Why, then, one might very well ask, is the President allowed to be *above* the law? As Peter Van Dresser [has written](#), with obvious moral indignation:

While you're savoring your cup o' joe [i.e., coffee], imagine the president of the United States hunched over his own coffee, considering the murder of another American citizen. Now, if *you* were plotting to kill an American over coffee, you could end up in jail on a whole range of charges including—depending on the situation—terrorism. However, if the president’s doing the killing, it's all nice and—let’s put those quote marks around it—“legal.” How do we know? We’re assured that the Justice Department tells him so. And that’s justice enough in post-Constitutional America.

Tom Engelhardt adds, in his introduction to this piece:

It’s not that American presidents have never been associated with assassination attempts before. At a National Security Council meeting, Dwight D. Eisenhower personally ordered the CIA to “eliminate” Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, then feared as a future “Castro of Africa.” “After a dead silence of fifteen seconds,” Tim Weiner tells us in *Legacy of Ashes*, his history of the CIA, “the meeting went on.” And the Kennedy brothers were evidently involved in at least one attempt to kill Fidel Castro, while the CIA of Lyndon Johnson’s era mounted a massive assassination program in Vietnam. Still, in those days, something dark and distasteful

clung to the idea and presidents preferred to maintain what was called “plausible deniability” when it came to such efforts. (In 1981, by Executive Order, President Ronald Reagan actually banned assassination by the U.S. government.)

Granted that assassination attempts—whether carried out via drone’s (O’Bomber’s preference, apparently) or some other means—are not initiations of wars (although, conceivably, they could be initiators of wars). Granted also that many of our “wars” have been described euphemistically with other words, and have not been initiated by Congress—and that our entry into World War II may have been provoked by the Roosevelt administration, with Congress then making the formal declaration.

Still, in a sense, assassinations *are* declarations of war, and I find no warrant for them—either in the Constitution, or in common morality! Our Chief Executive should be about the business of *executing the orders* given to him (or her—if we ever have a female Executive) by Congress, not *executing people*! Is there ANYONE IN THIS WORLD WHO DISAGREES WITH THIS?!! (I would like to think of this as a rhetorical question!)

I have argued in previous essays that global warming is likely to bring about our society’s collapse (along with most other societies), but in one earlier essay argued that the resulting “ruin” might not be a bad thing! Implicit in my thinking in that essay was my conviction that (a) our society has numerous problems/deficiencies, (b) there is no obvious solution to these problems/deficiencies, with (c) the prospect that they will not only continue to fester, but will continually worsen. The only “bright spot” that I could see was the prospect of societal collapse, resulting from global warming (although Thom Hartmann has argued that a devastating *economic* “crash” might occur in 2016).

Why might that be a “good thing”? Because it would provide the opportunity (but only perhaps!) for a society rising “out of the ashes” that would actually be *worth living in*! Unfortunately, a New Society of that sort is likely rise only if efforts start YESTERDAY to create it—and I see no evidence of this occurring.

Global Warming Disappointments

Alton C. Thompson

Several book-length discussions of global warming have been published in recent years, such as Elizabeth Kolbert's [*Field Notes From a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*](#) (2007), David Archer's [*Global Warming: Understanding the Forecast*](#) (2011), Thom Hartmann's [*The Last Hours of Humanity: Warming the World to Extinction*](#) (2013), Seymour Simon's [*Global Warming*](#) (2013), and Elizabeth Kolbert's [*The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*](#) (2014).

In addition to books that have *affirmed* global warming's reality, and discussed the relevant science, there have been such books as McKenzie Funk's [*Windfall: The Booming Business of Global Warming*](#) (2014)—which “investigates” how people are “cashing in” on the global warming “scare”!—and “denialist/hoax” books such as Brian Sussman's [*Climategate: A Veteran Meteorologist Exposes the Global Warming Scam*](#) (2010) and Roy W. Spencer's [*The Great Global Warming Blunder: How Mother Nature Fooled the World's Top Climate Scientists*](#) (2012).

Part of what's disappointing in this body of literature is the number of works of a “denialist” nature—works intended to appeal to a popular (and “populist”—as opposed to “elitist”?) audience, such as the book of “weatherman” Sussman (who is NOT a climate scientist!), of whom it has been said:

A distinguished, award-winning television weatherman in San Francisco, Brian Sussman deftly melds easy-to-understand scientific facts with provocative commentary. Sick of twisted "facts" mass-marketed to manipulate basic living decisions and common-sense energy consumption, Sussman indicts a cabal of elitist politicians, bureaucrats and activists who front the environmental movement to push intrusive, Marxist-derived policies in a quest to become filthy rich.

Talk about being both insulting and dishonest!

In addition, however, even the literature that takes global warming seriously is disappointing in the *suggestions* that it makes for addressing this problem. One would not expect a climatologist to offer any worthwhile suggestions regarding this matter, of course, for the simple reason that as a *scientist* his (or her) orientation is to discovering *how* things are and then offering an explanation(s) of *why* they are as they are. Explanations offered are typically of a tentative nature, given that less empirical support usually exists for an explanation being offered than for the “facts” for which an explanation is offered. In addition, because suggestions as to what to *do*

are of a different “order” than are scientific findings/explanations, suggestions, because of their being inherently *normative*, tend to be eschewed by scientists.

A scientist might, however, argue that (a) because Y (e.g., global warming) is a function of X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 , and that (b) because variable X_2 is especially subject to human manipulation, it’s “obvious” that what should be done is to reduce the value of X_2 , because doing so will reduce the value of Y (in this case reduce CO₂ emissions, thereby reducing the threat of global warming, seemingly. That is a suggestion may be made that, rather than being thought of as normative nature, is thought of as being simply a logical deduction from his/her research—or a matter of common sense.

Such reasoning may *seem* to be perfectly logical and reasonable—and even seem to be untainted by questions of “should.” But although this line of reasoning seems to be perfectly reasonable, and even untainted by the normative, the reasoning is flawed in two important respects: First, it tacitly assumes—*merely* assumes, I should add—that the threat of global warming will go away if the value of X_2 is reduced; second, it assumes that reducing X_2 *can* be done—and done *in time* to avoid catastrophe.

Both assumptions are questionable—and *that* fact is a serious one! As I have noted in previous essays on this site, the first assumption is erroneous for at least four reasons:

- The “[tipping point](#)” is believed by most climate scientists to be about 2° C.—with some such scientists believing that it is *lower* than that.
- The amount of increase that has occurred so far (i.e., since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) is about 0.8° C.
- The “[climate commitment](#)” value is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C.
- We humans are continuing to pour greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, there being no reason to believe that this “pouring” will cease in the near future—a “switchover” to “safe” energy sources having occurred.

Given these facts (or *near* facts!), it is obvious that even a cessation of pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere TOMORROW would not prevent the tipping point from being reached, and then crossed. **Our best knowledge about global warming leads, inevitably, to the conclusion that because the tipping point *will* be reached and crossed, catastrophe is inevitable at some point in the near future.** I *hope* that I am wrong about this, but believe it best to *assume* that catastrophe is inevitable, and then begin planning what one should do given that strong possibility.

If one's assumption here turns out to be *wrong*, one can rejoice that it *was* wrong! If, however, one ignores the *threat* posed by global warming, one's life may be cut short by the various indirect effects of global warming—so that one is *unable* to rejoice, period!

Because the first assumption stated above is (probably) wrong, it follows that the second one is also—i.e., the assumption that “reducing X_2 *can* be done—and *in time* to avoid catastrophe.” I would add, however, that even if it seemed *theoretically* possible to avoid catastrophe (by, e.g., quickly removing most of the “excess” carbon in the atmosphere via [geo-engineering](#) measures), the fact that (a) the measures needed to engage in the necessary actions would need to be undertaken by government and (b) government shows no inclination to undertake the actions, the necessary actions are not likely to be undertaken. The first point above, however, “trumps” the second one. Let's hope that that continues, given the possibility that geo-engineering measures might [exacerbate our problems](#)!

Thom Hartmann is an example of a non-scientist commentator, [one who offers](#) “Renaissance Thinking About the Issues of the Day,” among his concerns being global warming (note that earlier I referred to a book by him on the subject). As a non-scientist his interest is more in the “what to do about it part” than the science part, and he has offered a number of [suggestions](#) on this matter. Rather than *summarizing* them here, however, I will just *list* them—and then offer a few comments regarding them (visit his web site if you wish to know what he says under each point):

- Tell your friends.
- Vote with your wallet.
- Lighten your carbon load.
- Pressure your politicians (which he also [suggests in this article](#)).[1]
- Fund the solutions.
- Join a climate campaign.

Given that I am an admirer of Hartmann, I am reluctant to be overly-critical of his suggestions as to how to respond to the global warming problem, but I have one basic problem with them: They assume, implicitly, that:

- A tipping point will *not* be reached, and then crossed.
- Because of that, our society (and others) will *not* collapse.

- Because societal system collapse is not imminent, there is no need to *anticipate* it, and *plan* what one will do *before* it begins to collapse.

“[Talkers Magazine](#) named Thom Hartmann as the 8th most important talk show host in America in 2011, 2012, and 2013,” and I am happy for Thom that he is able to reach many people with his radio program (I, myself, never listen to the radio; when in my automobile, I’m almost always listening to classical music—French horn music this morning, because I used to play that instrument). What disappoints me about Thom’s advice, however, is that he is *misleading* people—not alerting them to the *severity* of the problem that global warming presents to us humans, the fact that it threatens our continued survival as a species, with the possibility that it will render our species extinct.

In my opinion, *misleading* advice is worse than *no advice at all*, precisely because it has the tendency of lulling people into a state of complacency. If there is anything that we *don’t* need today it is complacency!

Some today are misleading the public as to *whether* global warming is occurring; others affirm the fact (and I’m convinced that it *is* a fact!) that global warming is occurring, but lull the public into believing that it will not eventuate in *catastrophe*. One might, I suppose, argue that the latter is the lesser of the two evils, but that possibility does not change the fact that *both* are evils!

Endnote

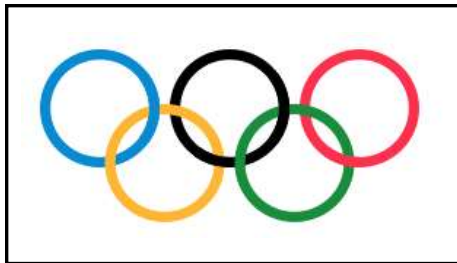
1. Consider [this statement](#): “Mr. [Mike] Lofgren cynically claims that Wall Street and corporate America are only concerned with “sucking as much money out of the country as they can. And they’re about control....” By all appearances, they’ve done a good job, earning very high marks, especially for “sucking money out of the system,” when one considers the fact that, according to the Tax Justice Network and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), up to \$32,000,000,000,000 (thirty-two trillion USD) is secretly hidden offshore in trust funds and shell corporations in tax-free jurisdictions.”

Given this, and the fact that Wall Street and corporate America control our politicians, it is foolish beyond measure to look to politicians for any meaningful leadership.

[The Olympics as Symbol](#)

Alton C. Thompson

There is, on the one hand, the [Olympic symbol](#), and then there is the Olympics (plural) *as* a symbol. As to the Olympic symbol itself, it is well-known, consisting of five interlocking rings,



each of a different color, on a white background—giving a total of six colors. “The symbol was originally designed in 1912 by Baron [Pierre de Coubertin](#), co-founder of the modern Olympic Games. According to Coubertin, the ring colors with the white background stand for those colors that appeared on all the national flags that competed in the Olympic games at that time.” The same man proposed, in 1894, the motto for the Olympic games, “[hendiatriis](#) *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, which is [Latin](#) for “Faster, Higher, Stronger.”

The question addressed here, however, is not what is the Olympic *symbol*, but what do the Olympics *symbolize*. My brief answer: Futility! With the futility associated with the Olympics existing at two levels, the *national* level and the *individual* level.

This table shows the [all-time number of medals](#) for those countries receiving the most medals, arranged on the basis of total number of medals (the population figures for European countries are from [this site](#), comparable figures for the United States and Canada from [this one](#)):

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Population (millions)	T/P
Norway	118	111	100	329	5	65.8
United States	96	102	83	281	318	0.9
Austria	59	78	86	218	8	27.3
Germany	78	78	53	209	81	2.6
Canada	62	55	53	170	35	4.9
Finland	42	62	57	161	5	32.2
Sweden	50	40	54	144	10	14.4
Switzerland	50	50	48	138	8	17.3
Russia	49	40	35	124	143	0.9
Italy	37	34	43	114	60	1.9
Netherlands	37	38	35	110	17	6.5
France	31	31	47	109	67	1.6

The table has two problems: Germany used to be divided, and Russia used to be part of the USSR, but the intention here is not precision. Rather, my intention is first to note that the winter Olympics have been dominated by European countries and two countries (the U. S. and Canada) whose populations have been basically European in

origin. Their northern latitude, along with mountainous conditions in many of these countries, helps account, second, for why *some* European countries are represented here and not others (the Netherlands being on the list because of their strong showings in skating competitions).

The interesting feature of the table, however, is the figures in the last row—the ratio of a country’s population to total number of medals received over the years. The figures for Norway,

Finland, and Austria are the largest, with the United States and Canada having figures considerably lower. What the former numbers seem to reflect is that these countries—all relatively small in territorial extent—are so dominated by mountains that winter sports would “naturally” become a national preoccupation. After all, engaging in sporting events, because they provide one with physical exercise, is good for one’s health (with, however, some risk involved with skiing), and if one has ready access to a ski slope, one has no excuse not to take advantage of that fact (depending, though, on one’s age, whether one has a handicap, etc.).

My questions, however, relative to the Olympics are:

- Why does one feel it necessary to engage in, e.g., skating for competitive reasons? Why, rather, can’t one be satisfied with just skating for exercise? After all, skating for competitive reasons involves *excessive* exercise!
- If one is going to skate competitively, why does one feel it necessary to allow skating so dominate one’s life that one *has* no life?! Granted that one gains pleasure from developing, and then utilizing, a skill. But skating is a *useless activity*; there is no *rational* justification for wasting one’s time spending so much time on this activity! It’s one thing to skate competitively for the exercise and for the fun of being with others (on a team—as is the case with [ice dancing](#)). But why is being the best ice dancing team in the world a worthy objective—given that the hours and hours of practice involve *work* rather than *fun*?!
- Why do *countries* feel a need to support Olympic sports within their countries, the purpose being their country garnering the most medals and, therefore, “bragging right”? After all, isn’t it rather childish to see “bragging rights”?

I’ll admit that I spent a little time watching the Sochi Olympics, especially the first Sunday afternoon when I was waiting in an emergency room for my younger daughter to be examined for a vertigo problem. And, being somewhat of a chauvinist, I was “pulling” for Norway, given that my great great great grandfather—Torje Tjøstolvsen Solberg—had left the Tvedestrand area of Norway in 1852 for the United States (and [Sonja Henie](#) is supposedly in the family tree someplace).

As I reflect on the Olympic games, however, I am unable to see much merit in them. They *do* provide an opportunity—a unique one, I’ll admit—for people (young ones especially) from all over the world to get together, socialize, and learn something about the sponsoring country, and about people from other countries: Such an experience can help break down barriers that may exist between various peoples. But given that the number of participants is rather small, and their main concern is with performing well in their sport(s), the amount of learning and interaction that takes place is small, so that the impact on countries’ foreign relations is likely miniscule, if not zero.

From an *individual* standpoint I suppose that participants are “driven” to become Olympians either by a personal need for attention/fame, or such a need on the part of parents. That is, feelings of *inferiority* may be the driving force at the individual level. The irony here, of course, is that such feelings can be overcome via competition *only* if one is a winner or near winner (i.e., wins either a gold, silver, or bronze medal); given that only a few individuals *can* be winners, most go home as losers—so that a feeling of inferiority remains with most of the participants.

One would think that someone thinking about becoming an Olympian would realize this fact, and then decide “Forget it! I’m not going to waste my time trying to win on an international level.” But evidently few go through such a thinking process, and people will continue to become Olympians—at least until societies start collapsing, within a matter of decades, as a result of global warming.

Whereas the psychology of individuals is such that it is somewhat understandable why individuals are foolish enough to become Olympians, one would think that the leaders of – *countries* would not suffer from feelings of inferiority. After all, they presumably reached “high” positions in their countries in large part because of strong egos! Why, then, do they even *care*, one way or another, whether people from their country compete in the Olympics?! And why do they even then provide resources for the use of some of their citizens to enhance their training experience—so that they will perform well?

I’m not aware of any psychiatrists whose specialty is sanity at the national level—and [Erich Fromm](#) (author of [The Sane Society](#), 1956, is no longer with us). (It’s been some time since I’ve read Fromm’s book, so I don’t recall if he discusses competitive sports.)

As I stated at the beginning, more and more have I come to realize that so much that goes on in our society is of a futile nature, with the Olympic sports symbolizing well that futility. If we humans had any brains, we would realize that we should be attending to the various problems we face as humans—the threat of global warming being the primary one currently—and should cease our foolish—no, insane!—preoccupation with trivialities such as competitive sports—Olympic and otherwise.

Contrary to the Olympics motto, “faster, higher, stronger” are trivial goals—especially today, faced as we are with the prospect of the extinction of our species as a result of global warming!

The *Philosophical* Reason for (Near) Despair

Alton C. Thompson

Philosopher [Clive Hamilton](#), [1] concluded his 2010 “Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change” [2] with these words:

Climate denial can be understood as a last-ditch attempt to re-impose the Enlightenment’s allocation of humans and Nature to two distinct realms, as if the purification of climate science could render Nature once again natural, as if taking politics out of science can take humans out of Nature. The irony is that it was Enlightenment science itself, in the rules laid down by the Royal Society, that objectified the natural world, putting it on the rack, in Bacon’s grisly metaphor, in order to extract its secrets. We came to believe we could keep Nature at arms-length, but have now discovered, through the exertions of climate science, something premoderns took for granted, that Nature is always too close for comfort.

The “objectification” of Nature which occurred as a result of the [Enlightenment](#) resulted, Hamilton argued, in the placement of “humans and Nature to two distinct realms,” which placement on the one hand enabled scientific endeavors to proceed, but also “infected” the thinking of virtually everyone (those living in “advanced” societies in particular).

In other words, the Enlightenment resulted in an *intellectual* distancing of humans from Nature; I would add to Hamilton’s assertion that that intellectual distancing was reinforced by the *physical* distancing that resulted as urbanization proceeded. Ironically, the latter sort of distancing has occurred even with many rural people in “advanced” societies, as a result of their economic orientation to urban markets and the “infecting” power of, e.g., television to which they expose themselves. As a result, virtually *everyone* living in our society is *intellectually* distanced from Nature, even if not *physically* so distanced!

It is their intellectual distancing from Nature that has allowed scientists to study atmospheric from a scientific perspective and, thereby, to discover that *changes* have been occurring in the atmosphere that have tremendous significance for humans. We can be thankful that climatologists have provided us with valuable research results relative to global warming.

There is a “downside” to distancing from Nature, however, and that is the implications this distancing has for those who are *non*-scientists—and perhaps even scientists other than climatologists. That downside is that those who are *not* climatologists interested in global warming rarely give much thought to Nature. If their lives were closely intertwined with the processes of Nature, they would be *forced* to pay attention to Nature, and whatever “unnatural” changes might be occurring therein—for *their very survival* depended on such attention. But few in “advanced” societies have such a relationship with Nature, so that their intellectual and

physical distancing from Nature makes it difficult—virtually impossible, in fact—to relate to Nature in a way that encourages them to pay much attention to it.

It is not surprising, then, that few in our society have much *knowledge* about global warming, with most not even giving much thought to the “news” that they *do* learn about global warming. Of course, the mass media—geared as they are to what they believe people will be interested in—tend to convey little information about global warming, in part because they know their viewers/readers lack interest in the subject, in part because their corporate sponsors don’t want viewers/readers to be “alarmed” about global warming, and stop purchasing their products.

The information that most *do* receive about global warming seems to come from vocal “deniers,” so that if the average person *does* know anything about global warming, it is likely to be “information” that is either misleading or false.

As a result of this widespread lack of interest in, and knowledge about, global warming, combined with the presence of vocal “deniers,” what’s likely is that greenhouse gas emissions will continue, and continue to increase, with the *effects* of those emissions becoming increasingly severe. A point will be reached, of course, when the reality of global warming begins to enter the consciousness of everyone except those living in remote caves, so that even the “deniers” will need to “eat their words.”

The problem with that eventuality is that it is *already* too late to prevent the tipping point from being reached and crossed, so that when the tipping point *is* actually reached (assuming that it hasn’t been already [3]!), it will mean utter disaster for our species—perhaps to the point of extinction.

We are in the current situation *directly* because of our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation activities, but *underlying* both of those activities has been our distancing from Nature—both intellectual and physical.

Had *intellectual* distancing not occurred, it’s highly likely that *physical* distancing would not have been *able* to occur—and so would *not* have occurred. I say “not have been *able*” because the *technological* developments that were necessary for urbanization to occur—and which were then further stimulated by urbanization itself—likely would not have occurred in the absence of the intellectual distancing “produced” by the Enlightenment. However, so enamored are most in our society with technology and its products that most in our society would not even be able to *comprehend* this point, to say nothing about *accepting* it!

Those of us who recognize today that (a) global warming is occurring, (b) that it is virtually certain that the tipping point will be reached and crossed “soon” (i.e., within a matter of decades—perhaps even years), (c) resulting in a severe culling of the human population, so that (d) engaging in pre-adaptive activities now has some possibility of “saving” those who do so, so that (e) they should begin doing so, with (f) the hope that their efforts will be copied by others,

thereby (g) enabling the maximum possible number of humans to be “saved” from the culling, need to begin acting. Would that more of us had the *means* to act!

We need to recognize that the intellectual and physical distancing from Nature that exists in our society means that it would be a waste of valuable time to try to convince ours of our dire situation. What is needed, rather, are appropriate *actions*—beginning *yesterday*! That might not be enough to “save” even ourselves, if not others; but we need to *hope* that it is.

Endnotes

1. At [Charles Sturt University](#) in Australia.
2. Here is a link to the document:
[http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CDgQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fclivehamilton.com%2Fpdfdownloader.php%3Fpdf%3Dhttp%3A%2F%2Fclivehamilton.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2012%2F11%2Fwhy we resist the truth about climate change.pdf%26title%3DWhy%2BWe%2BResist%2Bthe%2BTruth%2BAbout%2BClimate%2BChange&ei=0fYNU9fyJoSoqgHs8oCIDA&usg=AFQjCNGL_mG7pYbwBbxKFz4eqQRXjx37_A](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CDgQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fclivehamilton.com%2Fpdfdownloader.php%3Fpdf%3Dhttp%3A%2F%2Fclivehamilton.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2012%2F11%2Fwhy%20we%20resist%20the%20truth%20about%20climate%20change.pdf%26title%3DWhy%2BWe%2BResist%2Bthe%2BTruth%2BAbout%2BClimate%2BChange&ei=0fYNU9fyJoSoqgHs8oCIDA&usg=AFQjCNGL_mG7pYbwBbxKFz4eqQRXjx37_A) I tried to create a hyperlink in my essay to this document, but was not able to do so.
3. We simply don’t know whether it has or not. But it makes sense to assume that it will occur “sooner” rather than “later.”

Will There Be an ACT II?

Alton C. Thompson

There already *is*, in the sense that our son—Andrew Charles Thompson—is an ACT II. That’s not what I mean, however, with the question in my title.

[Ira Chernus](#), a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado, notes in a [recent article](#):

Apocalyptic stories have been around at least since biblical times, if not earlier. They show up in many religions, always with the same basic plot: the end is at hand; the cosmic struggle between good and evil (or God and the Devil, as the New Testament has it) is about to culminate in catastrophic chaos, mass extermination, and the end of the world as we know it.

That, however, is only Act I, wherein we wipe out the past and leave a blank cosmic slate in preparation for Act II: a new, infinitely better, perhaps even perfect world that will arise from the ashes of our present one. It’s often forgotten that religious apocalypses, for all their scenes of destruction, are ultimately stories of hope; and indeed, they have brought it to millions who had to believe in a better world a-comin', because they could see nothing hopeful in this world of pain and sorrow.

In the world of (fictional) *stories* concerning apocalypse, that is, the apocalyptic ACT I is followed by ACT II, in which “a new, infinitely better, perhaps even perfect world . . .” is depicted. The question that arises in the case of the threat of global warming that is now being presented to us, however, is: Is it a mere *story*, or is it a projection based on reasonable assumptions; and if the latter, will it be followed by an ACT II?

Chernus seems to suggest the latter in stating:

With doom creeping up on us daily in our environmental slow-motion apocalypse, what we may well need now is a slow-motion revolution. Indeed, in the energy sphere it's already happening. Scientists have shown that renewable sources like [sun](#) and [wind](#) could provide all the energy humanity needs. Alternative technologies are putting those theories [into practice](#) around the globe, just not (yet) on the scale needed to transform all human life.

Perhaps it's time to make our words and thoughts reflect not just our fears, but the promise of the revolution that is beginning all around us, and that could change in a profound fashion the way we live on (and with) this planet. Suppose we start abiding by this rule: whenever we say the words "Keystone XL," or talk about any environmental threat, we will follow up with as realistic a vision as we can conjure up of “Act II”: a new world powered solely by renewable sources of energy, free from all carbon-emitting fuels, and inhabited in ingeniously organized new ways.

How is one to react to these statements? I have several problems with them:

- Chernus is correct in stating that, at present, “renewable sources like [sun](#) and [wind](#) could provide all the energy humanity needs.” The relevant question here, however, is: How *likely* is it that the relevant technology will be deployed? For me, it doesn’t seem *at all* likely, for we continue to use fossil fuels “as if they were going out of style,” and this usage is on the increase rather than the decrease. Chernus admits that these technologies have “not (yet) [been implemented] on the scale needed to transform all human life.” The “yet” that he added to his statement suggests that “all is not lost,” but is that the case, in fact? That is a matter that I address in the next few points.
- If a massive effort of “conversion” were to occur, it would need *government* leadership—but I see no evidence that government is willing to *provide* such leadership. If anything, government is “aiding and abetting” corporations, including those corporations involved in producing fossil fuels. Given the “buying” of politicians that occurs by various powerful interests, this is totally unsurprising.
- If government *were* to undertake a massive program of conversion, it’s likely to be “too little, too late”—given that the “[tipping point](#)” regarding atmospheric changes seems to be “near at hand”—with even the possibility that it has already been crossed!
- If government *does* get involved, it’s more likely to be with one or more geo-engineering measures. Again, such measures are likely to be “too little, too late,” with the possibility (as [Al Gore](#) has noted) that such measures would be disastrous rather than salvific.
- Chernus refers to “the promise of the revolution that is beginning all around us” What he seems to suggest in stating this is that a “revolution” has begun, and this revolution *will* be successful. How else is one to interpret his suggestion that “Suppose we start abiding by this rule: whenever we say the words “Keystone XL,” or talk about any environmental threat, we will follow up with as realistic a vision as we can conjure up of “Act II””

This suggestion bothers me! Chernus seems to believe that because a “revolution” in sources of energy has begun, it will continue—until the new energy sources “push out” the “bad” ones that have been dominant since the Industrial Revolution began—coal, petroleum (along with uranium?).

What such a scenario *ignores*, however, is that if the tipping point occurs with an increase in the global mean temperature of 2° C. (using, e.g., 1850 as the baseline, and recognizing that some scientists would quote a smaller number), the facts that (a) the global mean has *already* increased by 0.8° C., (b) the “[climate commitment](#)” value is between 1° C. and 1.5° C., and (c) we humans

continue to pour greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (by our burning of fossil fuels and our deforestation activities), it is virtually certain that the tipping point *will* be reached, and crossed, within a few decades, if not years.

Once that occurs atmospheric changes will accelerate, resulting in numerous changes that affect human life—including the wiping out of most of the world’s population, if not outright extinction of our species. The reason that reaching the tipping point is so dangerous is the potential effects, of course, but also the fact that once it is reached and crossed **there will be no possibility of stopping the resulting effects: One will either need to learn to live with those effects (which may not even be possible!), or one will die.**

The advice offered by Chernus—“wait around for things will get better”—is the *worst* possible advice that one could give today, given that it shows no understanding of what the future has in store for us. Unfortunately, Tom Engelhardt—on whose web site the article appears—has as little a grasp of the seriousness of the problem of global warming as does Chernus.

The likelihood, as I see it, is either that there *will* be no ACT II, or there will be and it will be “Hell on earth.” I *wish* that I could be more optimistic about the future, but see no reason to be. Put another way, if one is “[left behind](#)” as global warming “does its thing,” one may *wish* that one were dead, and follow that wish by accomplishing suicide.

The Soyience of the Lambs

Alton C. Thompson

It is only six years [1] until 2022, the year in which the movie [*Soylent Green*](#) was set. If we are to progress to the point depicted in that movie, we have a way to go—and it's doubtful that we will be able to reach that point of development in a mere six years. What's especially discouraging is that our government doesn't even seem to be *interested* in the basic ideas (what I deem to be *proposals*) set forth in that movie—first, the use of assisted non-living clinics to obviate the need for nursing homes, those facilities providing a pleasant “journey” in one's egress from the world (via piped-in music by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Grieg: What a way to go!)

The second great idea promoted by the movie is that corpses thereby obtained were not allowed to go to waste—either via cremation or embalming, followed by burial. Rather, they became a valuable source of food (“soylent green” in the movie) for the population.

The ideas presented/promoted by the movie are not, however, flawless. I don't know if the author—Harry Harrison—of the book ([*Make Room! Make Room!*](#)) or the writer of the screenplay—Stanley R. Greenberg—had ever read Jonathan Swift's [*A Modest Proposal*](#), but if they had read this pamphlet, they might have reconsidered the idea of obtaining protein from older people. They evidently recognized that such meat would be unpalatable unless processed; why, then, did they insist that the processing of this meat into soylent green made sense from an *economic* standpoint—to say nothing of resulting in a food that likely would have any appeal to one's taste buds?

Why, one might ask, did they not continue to embrace the proposal of assisted non-living facilities for the elderly (who, after all, are a significant burden on the economy), but then propose to use the meat—in an unprocessed form—for feeding to pigs, which then could be used to feed people?

But not only should the screenwriter have deleted the soylent green part of his script—which would have necessitated a change in the movie's title, course, but surely he, together with the movie's director (Richard Fleischer), could easily have come up with another equally “catchy” title for the movie. They should have added to the script a *second* use for their assisted non-living facilities, that of processing children of a very young age. That's what Jonathan Swift did in his pamphlet, and his proposal demonstrated far more originality than does *Soylent Green*.

Swift, in observing widespread poverty in Ireland, and being concerned about it, [*proposed*](#) a program to

fatten up these undernourished children and feed them to Ireland's rich land-owners. Children of the poor could be sold into a meat market at the age of one, he argues, thus combating overpopulation and unemployment, sparing families the expense of child-bearing while providing them with a little extra income, improving the culinary experience of the wealthy, and contributing to the overall economic well-being of the nation.

Note that seven—seven!—benefits would flow from such a program, compared to just two in *Soylent Green*! And Swift didn't stop there. Creative man that he was, he went on to [suggest ways to prepare](#) the food thereby derived:

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.

In a sense, then, Swift proposed the serving of lamb—but of the *human* variety (hence my title).

Perhaps the screenwriter for *Soylent Green* was aware of Swift's earlier proposal, but rejected it for one of three reasons:

- He would have been accused of stealing the idea from Swift.
- He wanted to be original.
- He wanted to be controversial, but thought that even proposing assisted non-living clinics for the elderly was “pushing the limit,” so far as good taste was concerned.

I suspect that the screenwriter knew that he would receive criticism from Christian groups in the country—“fundamentalist” ones in particular—but that may have been a part of his calculations: By receiving criticism from such groups, the movie would receive free publicity, thereby increasing the box-office “take.” After all, the name “Greenberg” is obviously a Jewish name, and as everybody knows, the only interest that Jews have is in making money!

Still, it's unfortunate that Greenberg decided to limit his attention—so far as food is concerned—to the aged. Not only because food derived from that demographic is likely to be disgusting—even if (*especially* if?!) processed. But food derived from the young would not only be far more palatable, but could help solve the population problem (and thereby pollution problem), reduce the burden on the poor, reduce the burden on the rest of us taxpayers (because it would enable reductions in “food stamps,” etc.), etc.

Here I thought that Jews were supposed to be so smart—with Freud, Einstein being just two examples. It turns out, however, that Greenberg is not in the same category as those two illustrious individuals. Excuse me! It just occurred to me that Greenberg likely made more money from this movie than Freud or Einstein ever made in a year!

Endnote

1. I realize that it is 2014, so that 2022 is *eight* years into the future, not *six*. How, then, you may very well ask, did I make this mistake?

You may find my answer hard to believe (and only a fool *would* do so!), but here it is:

When I learned that daylight savings time was about to begin, I became mentally disoriented. I knew that something needed to be turned ahead, but couldn't remember what. In my state of confusion what I ended up doing was to turn my calendar *two years* ahead, instead of my clock *one hour*!

Because I threw away two years worth of sheets from my calendar, I was forced to purchase a new one. [Oh, woe is me!](#)

It Makes One Proud!

Alton C. Thompson

When I learn of examples of people acting on the behalf of strangers and/or acting on the basis of conscience, it makes me proud. Thus, recently, when a [distraught woman](#) started driving her car into the ocean (in an apparent attempt to commit suicide),

Tim Tesseneer was driving along Daytona Beach on Tuesday with his wife when they noticed the minivan driving through shallow water. They heard the screams, he said, of two children, who were crying and waving for help out of one of the rear windows.

Tesseneer threw the car in park and raced over to help. One child was screaming, Tesseneer recalled Wednesday to CNN's Piers Morgan. "Please help us, our mom is trying to kill us." The other child he could see was wrestling a woman for the steering wheel. But the woman just kept saying, "We're OK. We're OK. We're OK," as another man joined Tesseneer trying to get the driver to stop.

With the minivan in the cold, heavy surf of the Atlantic, the second man, Stacy Robinson, opened a door and pulled out the two panicked children. There was a good chance if he and Tesseneer hadn't been there, the children, ages 10 and 9, would have drowned inside the van as it pitched in the water, officials said.

What is happening to the woman in question (Ebony Wilkerson)?

Wilkerson was being held on three counts of aggravated child abuse in addition to the first-degree murder charge, Johnson said Friday.

Her bond has been set at \$1.2 million, said James Purdy, the elected public defender for the 7th Judicial Circuit of Florida. Purdy said he would seek a court hearing on that bond, which could occur in the next week or so. He said he was going to speak with Wilkerson on Saturday.

Granted that what this woman was trying to do—to herself and to her children—was a terrible thing. But how does it help *anyone* to bring *charges* against her rather than providing her with the *help* that she so desperately—and obviously—needs?! Something is surely wrong with the legal system in that part of the country!

A good example of acting on the basis of one's conscience was [recently demonstrated](#) by a group of Israeli youth:

"If necessary, I will go to jail."

Those are the words of 17-year-old Dafna Rothstein Landman, one of [60 and counting Israeli youth](#) who signed an open letter sent to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the weekend declaring their refusal of compulsory service in the Israeli military—the biggest wave of conscientious objection the country has seen [since 2008](#).

Dafna, one of the writers of this letter, came to her senses when only 15

when she began questioning her military service—a process she says was catalyzed when she reflected on the imprint of Israeli militarism on her own schooling experience. "I realized to what extent the education system is geared towards the Army and not towards further education, the job market, personal interests, etcetera," she said.

Soon after, she began traveling from her home in Tel Aviv to the West Bank, where she participated in Palestinian demonstrations against Israeli occupation. Here, she witnessed the "violence of the Army" first-hand. "I met people from those Palestinian villages," she said. "That meant that instead of names in a newspaper they became people, with faces and personalities."

Thus, Dafna, in learning about the miserable conditions to which Palestinians are subjected in her country, was not only bothered by what she learned, but chose to gain personal contact with some Palestinians, and even participate in demonstrations with them. So strongly has her conscience bothered her on this matter that she has joined with other Israeli youths in asserting that she will not be a party to being associated with the Israeli military, given its role persecuting and killing Palestinians.

Good for her and her fellow students, I say! I just wish that the politicians in this country at the national level—our president in particular—had the “guts” to stand up to [AIPAC](#) and other evil organizations/individuals who so poorly represent the Biblical values that they claim to abide by!

O'Bomber [recently said](#) on this matter:

But [Secretary of State] John Kerry, somebody who has been a fierce advocate and defender on behalf of Israel for decades now, I think he has been simply stating what observers inside of Israel and outside of Israel recognize, which is that with each successive year, the window is closing for a peace deal that both the Israelis can accept and the Palestinians can accept—In part because of changes in demographics; in part because of what's been happening with settlements; in part because Abbas is getting older, and I think nobody would dispute that whatever disagreements you may have with him, he has proven himself to be somebody who has been committed to nonviolence and diplomatic efforts to resolve this issue. We do not know what a successor to Abbas will look like.

Which statement indicates, perhaps, that both he and Kerry are getting fed up with Israel's intransigence on this matter, and are trying to push events in a more positive direction. Let us hope that that is the case!

Dafna and the others are right in condemning

the dehumanization of Palestinians living under occupation. In the Palestinian territories, "human rights are violated, and acts defined under international law as war-crimes are perpetuated on a daily basis," their letter states. "These include assassinations (extrajudicial killings), the construction of settlements on occupied lands, administrative detentions, torture, collective punishment and the unequal allocation of resources such as electricity and water."

Perhaps it is because our own country has been such a flagrant violator of international law over the years that our leaders have recognized this and therefore been reluctant to criticize the Israelis for *their* violations of that law—although Kerry's recent [hypocritical remarks](#) make one have doubts about such an interpretation.

Tim Tesseneer and Dafna Rothstein Landman are but two individuals who can be held up as heroes—individuals who exemplify what being a *human* should be about, and evidently was *common* for humans prior to the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago, which became a disturbing force in human history. What I mean by "disturbing force" is that that "event" resulted in a Discrepancy being introduced into human history—a Discrepancy between (a) the way of life for which we humans had become "designed" by evolutionary forces (namely environmental change, predation, and female-choice sexual selection—with Darwinian "natural selection" playing no role whatsoever) and (b) the ways of life that subsequently developed. (For more on this, see pp. 38 – 117 in my eBook, [What Are Churches For?](#))

This Discrepancy is likely the *fundamental* cause of virtually all problems that have inflicted us humans since, although no scholar has yet it taken upon himself or herself the task of *demonstrating* this—they preferring, rather, to concentrate on trivia. Which is unfortunate, because it's highly probable that even *global warming* has its *ultimate* basis in the Discrepancy.

If we had come to recognize this possibility long ago—for the *concept itself*, in some form at least, is old, going back to two of my "heroes," [Peter Kropotkin](#) and [Thorstein Veblen](#)—and had realized its implications, we might have begun efforts to create a way of life more in accord with our "design specifications"—one result being that the specter of global warming would not be haunting us now had we done so.

We did *not* do so, though, of course; as a result, global warming is likely to cull most of the world's population within a few decades, even years. It breaks my heart knowing that Tim Tesseneer and Dafna Rothstein Landman—to say nothing of my five grandchildren and countless others—are likely to be among those culled!

Goring Gore

Alton C. Thompson

Recently several scholars/writers have attempted to put the global warming that is currently occurring in geological perspective—e.g., Richard E. Leakey and Roger Lewin’s [*The Sixth Extinction: Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind*](#) (1995) and Elizabeth Kolbert’s [*The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*](#) (2014). Now it’s all “fine and dandy” to have scholarly works that discuss global warming in great detail from a scientific standpoint, but the question that arises about such books is: How *useful* are they, anyway?!

I am reminded of a question asked over 50 years ago by Everett Knight ([*The Objective Society*](#), 1960, p. 32) regarding intellectuals:

how are they to justify their position in our society[,] which is that of a man seated on the rear of a lorry examining the road behind while an incompetent driver moves on at a reckless speed in what is perhaps the wrong direction?

That is, no one (except for the “deniers” among us, of course) denies the importance of informing others to threats that exist either now or “down the road.” But unless people are also informed as to what to *do* with such information, and people then *act* on that information, the provision of “quality” information has been a waste of time.

[Al Gore](#)—author, several years ago, of [*An Inconvenient Truth: The Crisis of Global Warming*](#) (2007)—seemingly filled that gap two years later in his [*Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis*](#) (2009), but *did* he?

Several of his chapters are devoted to possible sources of energy other than fossil fuels—such as solar (Chapter 3), wind (Chapter 4), the earth itself (Chapter 5), the growing of fuel (Chapter 6), and the use of nuclear power (Chapter 8). In addition, he considers the saving of energy as a strategy (Chapter 12) and the capturing of carbon (Chapter 7).

What’s to be noted of *all* of these solutions, however, is the commonality that they are all *technological* solutions. That fact is a telling one, for it indicates that Gore believes that it is both *technologically* and *politically* possible to prevent the “[tipping point](#)” from being reached and crossed—the direct result of that “tipping” being the acceleration of “climate change.”

Is it technologically possible to prevent that tipping point from being reached? Evidently Gore believes so, for he claims that his book is “about the things we can do, the things we *must* do, to stop global warming before it’s too late.” That is, we can conclude from this statement that Gore

believes not only that the technological “fixes” discussed in his book *can* be implemented, but *will be*—because, after all, they *must* be implemented! (That is, he seems to believe in magic!)

Why does Gore believe that these various measures can be implemented? “For the past three years,” he states, “I have met with many scientists, engineers, and climate experts. What I have learned from them has given me hope.” The “hope” that Gore gained from these discussions was evidently gained by learning about the *feasibility* of implementing the technologies that he discusses in the book. As Gore goes on to say, “we already have all of the technology that we need. We have the tools we need to save our planet, but we must choose to use them.”

No kidding!! The relevant questions here, of course, are:

- *Will* we choose to use them? And
- If we *do* choose to use them, will their implementation “save” us?

By “we” Gore apparently means this country’s political leaders—the ones at the national level in particular. Given Gore’s experience as a politician—a former Congressperson, Senator, and Vice-President (during the presidency of William (“Bill”) Clinton)—he, more than virtually anyone, should know that the likelihood of his ideas being implemented by the national government **is close to zero, if not zero itself!**

This is not the only problem with Gore’s thinking, however. The second problem is that even if his ideas *were* implemented, it’s not likely that they would “save” us. Given that (a) the global mean has increased (since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) by about 0.8° C. already, (b) the “[climate commitment](#)” value is between 1° C. and 1.5° C., and the tipping point is believed to be no more than 2° C. (with some climate scientists placing the number at a lower point!), **it seems virtually certain that the tipping point will be reached and crossed**—with “all Hell breaking loose” then following.

True, it’s *conceivable* that a switchover to “safe” fuels could occur in time, but it’s not *believable*. Also, it’s *conceivable* that [geo-engineering](#) measures could be implemented soon enough to “save” us, but again it’s not *believable*. In addition, it’s possible that if such measures were implemented, they would simply add *new* problems to the mix—which [Gore himself](#) has recognized.

In my own thinking “long and hard” about the problem of global warming, I have reached the following unhappy conclusions; if I learn of new findings that change my thinking on this matter, I will do so. In the meantime, however, I am forced to believe that:

- Global warming *will not* be halted. This would require decisive actions by national governments here and elsewhere, and I cannot conceive of that occurring—given the influence that corporations and the rich have on governmental policies. One would like

to believe that the leaders of corporations and rich people are intelligent, educated, and “up” on what’s going on in the world, so that they would be fully aware of the threat that global warming poses **even for them**, but such does not seem to be the case! What I am reminded of here is Ripley’s “[Believe it or not!](#)” Unbelievable!—but true nonetheless.

- *Because* global warming will not be halted via decisive actions by governments, individuals who want to continue living will need to recognize the danger posed by global warming and then engage in pre-adaptive activities—recognizing that it is such activities that will afford them the best chance of surviving. As I have noted in previous essays, the main options here are homesteading and becoming an eco-communitarian, the latter option being preferable, given that it would permit some semblance of civilized life to be continued.
- Last, even *doing* the above would not guarantee survival, but *not* engaging in such activities would virtually guarantee *non*-survival.

Al Gore is a handsome man and I have every reason to believe that he is a decent person. Those traits do not, however, prevent him from being a “false prophet.” My advice is: “Don’t” listen to him, for he will only lead you astray!

We Need to Start Over Again

Alton C. Thompson

Here is a sampling of essays that have appeared recently on the internet:

Abby Zimet, [The Biggest, Baddest, Darkest Money \(and No, WSJ, It's Not From Big Bad Organized Labor\)](#)

Diane Ravitch, [Understanding the Propaganda Campaign Against Public Education](#)

Paul Buchheit, [Four Frightening Ways We're Reverting to the Dark Days of Our Past](#)

Jason Hirthler, [America's Unceasing Contempt for Venezuela](#)

Mike Whitney, [Big Oil's "Sore Losers" Lead the Drive to War](#)

Ron Jacobs, [The Pentagon Gets What It Wants \(Again\)](#)

John Logan, [How the GOP Ambushed the VW Union Election](#)

Terrance Heath, [Conservatives Offer Americans Empty Stomachs and Empty Rhetoric](#)

Candace Bernd, [Study: Nuclear Reactors Are Toxic to Surrounding Areas, Especially With Age](#)

Mark Karlin, [Developed Nations Give Up on Stopping Climate Change, Turn to Mitigating Impact, Largely Abandoning Third World](#)

Nomi Prins, [The Inevitability of Income Inequality](#)

Mark O'Connell, [Don't Act, Don't Tell: Anti-Gay Laws Make Targets of Us All](#)

Gary Younge, [The CIA's Dark Shadow in America](#)

Ed Pilkington, [Death Row Inmate Glenn Ford Freed 30 Years After Blatantly Wrongful Conviction by All-White Jury](#)

Steven Hill, [America Ranks 98th in the World? The Shocking Dismal Number of Women in Elected Office](#)

Josh Eidelson, [Say goodbye to public schools: Diane Ravitch warns Salon some cities will soon have none](#)

The *good* thing about these essays is that they were allowed to be posted! That is, our society has not (yet!) reached a point where the free expression of ideas is completely suppressed. [1] But we seem to be moving in a “police state” direction (No. 13)—a situation in which corporations and the government (which itself is increasingly dominated by corporate interests) are on a “warpath” against the public schools (Nos. 2, 16), labor (No. 1), and publicly-owned land (No. 3), are doing nothing to address the problem of global warming (No. 10), are meddling in the affairs of other countries (No. 4), are “hooked” on war (Nos. 5, 6); political parties are engaging in “dirty tricks” (No. 7); conservatives ignore the needs of the poor (No. 8) and promote anti-gay laws (No. 12), racism (No. 14), and sexism (No. 15); old nuclear reactors pose dangers (No. 9); inequality is growing (No. 11); etc.

The direction in which the United States is moving is by no means a *positive* one. Therefore, perhaps it is time for us to remember that the United States is an example of a “new start” country, with individuals from Spain, France, and England having made “new start” attempts in what became the United States, [the following](#) being some of the early such cases (Plymouth and the Massachusetts Bay Colony being the most *successful* such attempts):

1526: [Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón](#) tries to settle in South Carolina

1562: Failed Huguenot settlement in South Carolina ([Charlesfort-Santa Elena site](#))

1564: French Huguenots at Jacksonville, Florida ([Fort Caroline](#))

1565: Spanish found [Saint Augustine, Florida](#)

1585: Failed English settlement on Roanoke Island, North Carolina ([Lost Colony](#)).

1607 – [Jamestown](#) – English

1607 – [Popham Colony](#) – English

1610 – [Kecoughtan, Virginia](#) – English

1620 – [Plymouth Colony](#) – English

1630 – [Massachusetts Bay Colony](#) – English

A “new start” now would differ from the earlier ones, of course, in that the territory that became the United States was occupied before our arrival, those existing occupants being much less “advanced” from a technological standpoint than the new settlers. Given that, they were easy to kill, and so—“naturally!”—we killed them. After all, we needed their land, and the indigenous peoples were not making good use of the land!

In initiating a “new beginning” today there would be no need to kill the people currently occupying the territory of the United States. Besides, doing so would be expensive—just think of all the cartridges, hand grenades, bombs, etc. that would be required!—would be time-

consuming, and also probably illegal. Thus, any thoughts of emulating our forebears in their genocidal activities should be immediately put out of mind as impractical!

Speaking of the indigenous peoples that inhabited this territory before our arrival, an important point that should be kept in mind, however, is that their ways of life (gatherer-hunting, with some groups practicing “primitive” agriculture) were more “natural” than were those of the European settlers---and *far more* natural than our *current* ways of life. The importance of this fact is that the stimuli, behaviors, and thinking mode associated with a natural way of life, having an evolutionary basis, are what are necessary for good physical and mental health. Thus, in designing a New Society, it would be wise to “shoot” for as natural a way of life as possible—i.e., a way of life that would accord rather well with our “design specifications” as humans. In a sense, then, there should be an effort to “return” to a simpler—a more natural—way of life, *à la* that of our indigenous forebears.

As I am assuming that a “new start” would occur within the current boundaries of the United States (the “lower forty-eight” in particular), and in that respect would differ from the colonization efforts of our European forebears, whatever migration occurred with the New Society’s creation would be, at most, of an *inter*-state nature. And although any New Society movement would need to emulate our *indigenous* forebears in creating *communities*—the modern-day equivalent of their “tribes”—we might want to *not* refer to those communities as “colonies” (as our English forebears did).

Despite that likelihood, it is perhaps worth calling to mind that during the 1930s, during the New Deal program, [Ralph Borsodi](#) was promoting the use of that term. As John Curl, in his [For All The People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America](#) (2009, p. 315) notes:

The New Deal homestead colony program, created in the depths of the Great Depression, involved at least 99 communities through 3 different agencies, and about 11,000 families, totaling around 50,000 people.¹³ The basic idea was to give people in need the prerequisites for looking out for themselves: a house, some land, a way to make a living, and assistance to get started. It was also an attempt to bridge the boundaries between rural and urban, between agricultural and industrial. Of all the major New Deal programs, it was the smallest. Although burdened with undercapitalization, it touched numerous lives. Constantly attacked in Congress and the conservative press as socialistic, it was also critiqued from the Left as paternalistic and bureaucratic. The program came out of several schools of social and economic planning, particularly John Dewey’s radical empiricism. An immediate stimulus was the back-to-the-land movement touched off by Ralph Borsodi’s book *Flight from the City*, published in 1933, describing his family’s discovery of the agrarian lifestyle of homesteading as a way to escape the troubles of urban living.¹⁴

It's unlikely—no, unthinkable!—that the national government would undertake such a program today—a program having the incidental effect of undermining the Existing Order! And even if it *would*, those directing it wouldn't “have a clue” as to what its direction should take. Not only would they not know that one goal should be to provide, for residents, a way of life that would accord as well as possible for our “design specifications” as humans, but should also be designed with global warming in mind—i.e., designed to withstand, so far as is possible, the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans shortly (is doing so *already*, in fact!).

Getting a New Society program started would require (a) leadership by individuals with knowledge as to the goals to be sought, who also have leadership skills, and (b) financial backing—for the purchase of land (given that *stealing* land is no longer “kosher”!), building materials, and the hiring experts to offer guidance and workers to undertake the actual construction activity, etc. Given that none of those prospects are very good, it appears that we could just as forget about the whole idea, and simply accept the fact that we are doomed!

Granted that that's not a very pleasant fate to contemplate, but *realistically* it appears to be what will be occurring. We are in the “unusual” situation that (a) those with the financial means to fund the creation of a New Society see no need for societal system change, while (b) those who *do* recognize such a need are hampered in acting by their *lack* of resources.

It's true that “we *need* to start over again,” but it's virtually certain that that *won't occur*!

In the (fictional) story of Noah, humankind—with the exception of Noah and his family—was destroyed, and a “new start” was initiated by Noah and his family (with inbreeding presumably being involved!). The destruction was *directly* done by a flood, but the character “God” had been the cause of that flood.

In the near future, the destruction of (most? all?) humankind is likely, and will have been the result of human activity—our pouring of “greenhouse gases” into the atmosphere via our burning of fossil fuels (with deforestation also playing a role). *If* any people are “saved” from the ecocatastrophe that is probable in our near future, the “[ark](#)” of choice will be the cooperative [eco-community](#). This time around, however, there will be no guarantee of human survival, numerous other species having already become extinct as a result of human activities.

Endnote

1. Chris Hedges, in a [recent column](#), discusses how pro-Israeli organizations (e.g., AIPAC) and rich Jews have been pressuring universities to “toe the line” in supporting Israeli policies as they affect (negatively!) the Palestinians. This is outrageous!! When is our government going to stop its support of this evil, terrorist country?!

[Not sent for posting.]

Understanding Our Current Predicament

Alton C. Thompson

As an undergraduate I majored in History because I have long had an interest in how things have developed over time. Implicit in such an interest is the conviction that things are as they are *today* because they are the result of a long *developmental process*. That is, I tend to believe that the *explanations* that have most merit are those which assume that developmental processes have been at work that have “produced” the current situation. This is not to deny that true decision-making on the part of humans has *never* played a role in human history; it *is* to say, however, that often when people have *thought* that they have freely made decisions, in actuality internal and external factors of which they lack consciousness played the major role.

My presentation here will necessarily be of a cursory nature, and will emphasize those developments that I perceive of most importance in understanding our current predicament. I will use as my starting point the distant past, and begin with the observation that the earliest living creatures were ocean dwellers that needed to consume “food” in order to *continue* living; the fact that they were “equipped” with certain *senses* combined with certain movement abilities enabled these early creatures to detect and “capture” food.

At some point after a variety of ocean-dwelling creatures had developed, some of them began to spend some time on land, and creatures began to evolve having an ability to spend *all* of their time on land. The appendages which had developed while ocean dwellers began to change in form as evolution proceeded, becoming more adapted to movement on land. The development of increased mobility, in conjunction with the development of sight, sound, and smell, enabled creatures better to identify food, and “capture” it. And the further development of an upright posture with some creatures (our ancestors!), with some of the appendages (“legs”) evolving into arms with hands, increased the ability of those creatures to obtain food.

While these physical developments were occurring, the brain was also developing and increasing in size with these newly-upright creatures. The brain at this stage was basically acting as an organ for receiving stimuli, via the senses, from the environment, and then processing the “information” received, and “delivering” it, via the nervous system, to other organs, resulting in appropriate movements of, e.g., legs, arms, and hands. “Appropriate” here refers not only to actions involved in obtaining food, but also actions in response to threats by predators (that of “[flight](#)” being most common).

On the basis of the modern-day [study of chimpanzees](#), we can conclude that at some point in time our ancestors began to develop an ability to *think*—to, that is, “analyze” a situation, make *decisions* on the basis of that analysis, and then *act* on those decisions. And perhaps roughly

during the time when this mental development was occurring, communication with creatures of the same species began. This began as gestures by some that became understood as to their meaning by others of the same species, with those gestures being then taught to younger members of the species. Sounds likely accompanied gestures—with sounds be used to alert others of the species who were nearby that gestures were about to be made. Thus, I speculate that sounds originally were a means of communication in just a limited sense (used for “signaling”), with gestures being the first means of actual communication. (The fact that people tend to automatically make gestures while speaking today lends credence to this “theory” that gestures were the original language with our immediate ancestors.)

Of course, communication with others of one’s species presumes group living, and it would appear that the earliest such groups were mothers with young children. As brain development was occurring and brain size increased in consequence, a point was reached where the physical anatomy of females would not permit the birth of individuals fully capable of surviving on their own, so that babies needed to be born prematurely, thereby requiring maternal care—and thereby forming small groups, consisting of mother and young children.

Such a group was in danger from predators, and adult females apparently learned to have sex only with those adult males who demonstrated a proclivity to provide them with both protection from predators and food. Therefore, early on adult males became a part of these small groups, and it is the members of such groups who had the best chance to survive—and did. Given that the proclivity by the males involved was likely an inherited trait, offspring would have had a tendency to exhibit cooperative tendencies. Thus, the “selective breeding” (!) practiced by adult females was a key factor in directing the course of human evolution—as to both physical and behavioral traits.

With more and more of our ancestors living in small groups (that probably grew to no more than about 30 members), communication was encouraged by increasing group size, and tended to become more and more frequent. Our early ancestors did not have the physical “equipment” that would permit speech as we know it today, but those individuals most having such equipment likely were favored for reproduction purposes by adult females, so that by some point in time virtually everyone had developed that capacity. With more complex vocalization now possible, speech began to emerge, with a given group developing an elementary language—that gradually became more complex over time.

This development of language enabled the development of more abstract thought—i.e., the sort of thought that **enabled an increasing *intellectual* separation from the surround, despite a continued close *physical* connection with the surround**. The development and use (by at least some members of a group) of *written* language—and especially referring here to languages using *artificial* (“abstract”) characters, as with our *alphabetic* language—further increased the intellectual separation between those using such languages and their surround (presumably having this effect primarily for those members of a group who were directly involved in writing).

This development of increasingly abstract thought had extremely important implications for human history, for it led to the development of the domestication of certain plants (and, later, animals) which, in turn, led to (other) technological developments such as tools/implements, a more sedentary existence, a growing dichotomy between village/urban and rural, the emergence of social classes (with associated exploitation of some by others), etc. Thus, **not only was there a growing *intellectual* alienation from Nature, but a growing *physical* one as well.** These various developments are typically perceived by us moderns as representing “progress,” but they did (and do) have an extremely serious “down side,” a fact that I will address shortly.

It was not until the Industrial Revolution (beginning around 1750 CE), however, that the “down side” associated with the developments occurring during the previous Agricultural Revolution started to take on real significance. In part, this Revolution was enabled by the rise of scientific thinking and by technological developments that stemmed to a degree from those intellectual developments. At any rate, the intellectual developments associated with this Revolution further increased the intellectual separation that those affected by this Revolution had with their surround; and the technological and sociological changes that occurred involved a massive exodus from rural areas to urban areas—so that a notable *physical* separation with Nature began to occur with a larger and larger portion of the population.

Both the changes in the physical conditions of living for many and the increasing emphasis on abstract scientific thinking sparked a reaction, however, the [Romantic Era](#)—during which literature and music flourished, with an appreciation for Nature being exhibited with both.

If, however, one is living in a society within which one *must* isolate oneself from Nature for the sake of earning a living, a society more and more dependent for its operation on abstract thought, even if one is able to use some of one’s “free” time in a rural setting, Nature becomes for one a mere *setting* rather than an *influence*. And **because one’s *mind* is tending to become far removed from Nature, one does not realize how one’s *actions* impact Nature—and how that impact, in turn, might impact *oneself*, eventually, if not immediately.**

Granted that one’s actions are primarily dictated to one by the nature of the society within which one lives. But one still “owns” one’s actions, and in the industrialized society in which one now lives—initially powered by water power, but increasingly by the burning of coal (and, later, petroleum products)—some of one’s actions are resulting in the buildup of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere—i.e., resulting in an increasing “[greenhouse effect](#).”

Interestingly—and ironically—although the development of scientific thinking was *partly* responsible for this situation, at a still later point in time some scientists—[Svante Arrhenius](#) being one of the important early ones—[began to recognize](#) that humans were changing the atmosphere. In the early 1900s the consensus was that the warming that was occurring was “just a phase of some mild natural cycle, with unknown causes,” but [Guy S. Callendar](#) insisted that the pouring of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere was resulting in a warming *trend*—a position

that is widely accepted by climate scientists today, and is currently recognized (by climate scientists, at any rate!) as a serious problem.

Unfortunately, for so many people today global warming is either not on their “mental maps” or seems so abstract, so far away, that they have a difficult time taking it seriously. They may read about serious drought, fires that destroy huge areas, flooding massive storm systems, strange weather, etc., but they tend to be so absorbed in their everyday lives that they find it difficult to “connect the dots” (to allude to a misleading [advertisement](#) sponsored by the American Petroleum Institute) connecting those events to global warming. And this attitude of relative nonchalance is reinforced by the facts that vocal “deniers” present them with (false and/or misleading) “information” that they accept as true, along with the fact that governmental and other leaders are exhibiting no notable concern relative to the problem.

Our distant ancestors had an intellectual and psychological “investment” in Nature, and therefore were sensitive to “feedback” that they might receive from Nature. As a result, except for external facts that might impact Nature (e.g., volcanic activity), Nature remained rather stable over time as negative feedback mechanisms acted to “work” for stability. That is, early humans were not a (major) disturbing element relative to Nature.

Since the Industrial Revolution, however, our transfer of carbon (in the form of coal and petroleum) to the lower atmosphere (in the form of carbon dioxide) *has* had the result of significantly changing the atmosphere. The negative feedback mechanisms with which Nature is “equipped” have “fought” change, but a point will be reached when those mechanisms “give up,” and are replaced with *positive* feedback mechanisms—which will *accelerate* change.

The “progress” that we tout has, true, resulted in some “advancement,” but has been such as to have “side effects” of a negative nature: It has resulted, on the one hand, in affecting adversely the ecosystem upon which we depend for our very lives while, on the other hand, making us oblivious of that fact. It’s true that some in our midst have begun to “wake up” about our dire situation, but the warnings that go back to the 1930s have not been taken seriously—i.e., have not been acted upon—so that it is now too late (evidently) to halt further global warming. The ultimate result is that most of the world’s population will likely be wiped out within a matter of decades, or even years, with the possibility, even, that our species will go the way of the dinosaurs—but as the result of human actions, not external factors.

In various of the world’s religions forces of good/light are opposed by forces of evil/darkness ([Mithraism](#), [Manichaeism](#), [Zoroastrianism](#), and Christianity, with the latter’s God and Satan). And from a *secular* standpoint the equivalents are a “battle” between Reason and Nature (Eugene Linden, [Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies](#), 1979, p. 65) and [Guy R. McPherson’s](#) “baseball game” between Humans and Nature in which “[nature bats last](#).” None of these fits our present predicament, however, for if, e.g., we are in a baseball game with Nature, most of us are not even *aware* of that fact—and it most certainly is no game!

[This was not sent for posting.]

Where I'm "Coming From"

Alton C. Thompson

Like anyone, a number of different factors have affected how my thinking—moral and otherwise—has developed—my parents and siblings, my other relatives, the immediate area, state and country in which I was raised, my life experiences, etc. In addition, I'm sure that many of the causative factors have been ones of which I lack awareness. I cannot write about the latter, for the obvious reason that I lack awareness of them! But as to the factors of which I *do* have awareness, and believe have had an impact on my thinking, one of the earliest is the memory of a black man—a missionary from Africa—visiting the church in the small town where my parents took us to church—one that they, and several other young couples, had established prior to my birth.

What that fact taught me was that blacks, like whites, were also members of the human race and, therefore, should be treated as my equals. An important lesson to learn, indeed! A lesson that would “naturally” be generalized into the principle that *all* individuals are to be recognized as both *unique* in being individuals, and therefore *different* from all others, but both recognized *and* accepted in their uniqueness. While simultaneously others should be perceived as *equal* to all other individuals in *value*, and therefore treated with respect, and even love. That is, differences are *recognized*, but also *appreciated* and *honored*.

A second early experience that sticks in my mind is an incident that occurred while in eighth grade in primary school. During the noon recess I observed a bully beating up on my younger brother (in fifth grade). Although the bully was a year behind me, he was bigger than me. Nevertheless, I “tore into” him like a person gone [berserk](#) (an appropriate term here, given my Norwegian heritage), and that ended his bullying—for that day, at least.

I was attending a “[normal](#)” school at that time, and the school's principal—[Miss Lulu O. Kellogg](#)—happened to have observed this incident from her office window, which I didn't know at the time. At any rate, later that day she called me into her office, and I had no idea why she would do that. However, she proceeded to tell me that she had observed the incident from her window, and wanted to tell me that she was proud of me for defending my brother. She continued by foretelling my future, in a sense—for she told me that I should become either a teacher or a preacher.

I *did* become a teacher for eight years—two at Salisbury State College, in Salisbury, Maryland, and six at Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio—but despite a longstanding interest in religion, never aspired to be a minister (although our older daughter and her husband are currently both United Methodist pastors). However, *that* fact, in conjunction with my longstanding interest in

religion, is reflected in the religion that I have invented, [NeWFism](#) (the first of the two .pdf files there)—a clergy-less religion! A religion that so far exists only “on paper.”

Another important early influence on my intellectual development and development as a person is a book that I acquired the same year (1957) that I graduated from secondary school, [The Uses of the Past: Profiles of Former Societies](#), by Herbert J. Muller, a book being offered by the book club of which I was a member at the time. What that book suggested—in its very *title*—was that a knowledge of history could be *useful*; and that fact, in conjunction with the fact that I found the book interesting, may have been the reason why I chose History as my major in college.

After graduating from college I spent a year as a Faculty Assistant in Geography and Geology (the latter had been, along with English, my minor) at the college I had attended, and then went on to the University of North Carolina for an M.A. in Geography. While there I purchased a copy of Barrows Dunham’s [Heroes & Heretics: A Political History of Western Thought](#) (1964). That purchase not only demonstrated my continuing interest in history—despite the fact that I was now a Geography major who was minoring in Sociology—but “watered” a seed that had been sowed earlier, the idea that the study of History could be *useful*.

Having majored in History as an undergraduate, I had been exposed to a fair amount of world and United States history. But what the Dunham book did for me was to re-orient my thinking about the past. Dunham’s book exposed me to a number of individuals who had somehow been able to break free from the conventional thinking that was “imprisoning” their fellows, and who also had the courage to declare publicly their views as to what is true/right. Many had to “pay the price” for going “against the grain” of the conventional thinking of their time, but later their ideas triumphed, to become the *new* conventional wisdom (which is why we know about them now)!

Still more recently, I read John M. Barry’s superb [Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty](#) (2012), and have been impressed with the courage demonstrated by [Roger Williams](#) (co-founder of the [Rhode Island](#) colony, and originator of the “[wall between church and state](#)” principle) and his mentor in England, jurist [Sir Edward Coke](#).

In my own suggesting the creation of the new religion of NeWFism, I have gained strength from the knowledge—gained from Dunham’s book—that I have had *predecessors* in iconoclastic thought. However, in providing a *rationale* for NeWFism I have followed the lead of Sir Edward Coke in arguing (e.g., in my “[NeWFism and the Tradition](#),” the second of the two .pdf files there) that NeWFism is not novel in its *objectives*, being part of—and simply *extending*—a Tradition that goes far back in time. A Tradition that has been existing in a *deviant* form in both Christianity and Judaism for centuries, which I hope to get “back on track” with the introduction of NeWFism.

In my “Addressing our Uncertain Future” I even suggest that the central *institution* of NeWFism—the *New Word Fellowship* (NeWF), which is the *means* that I suggest for realizing the Tradition’s objective—*also* has precedents. Thus, although I am fully aware of the fact that the NeWF is a novel institution, its novelty lies less in its “mechanics” than in the proposal that it be made the centerpiece of a *new religion*, NeWFism—with that new religion having as its principal objective one that goes back to Bible times—at least in the sense that its central *ideas* are expressed in what Christians refer to as the “[Old Testament](#).” A religion that would more *authentically* represent the Tradition than any existing religion (or denomination, including Quakerism)—while not only *representing* that Tradition, but *furthering/extending* it in a manner having particular relevance for *today* (i.e., the widespread ill-being, physical and psychological, and well as the threat posed by global warming).

As I noted at the beginning, one can know only in part the factors that help “explain” one’s ideas, suggestions, values, etc. at any given moment in time, so the above discussion is but a “window” into such an explanation in the case of my own ideas, etc. But that discussion—along with the “[killing” incident in my past](#)—are what my *conscious* mind “holds up” as the key formative experiences in my past, and today (March 16, 2014) I have felt a need to record those memories.

In 45 minutes I will be leaving for an all-Mendelsohn concert (by the Milwaukee Festival Orchestra, led by Monte Perkins, a professor at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin) at the Pabst Theater (with [Frank Almond](#), the Milwaukee Symphony’s Concertmaster, playing Mendelsohn’s beautiful violin concerto). Also on the program are Mendelsohn’s “Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and his Symphony No. 3 (the “Scottish” symphony).

“Going Green” is No Answer!

Alton C. Thompson

The “[Real Simple](#)” website presents what they bill as the “Ultimate Guide to Going Green,” with their recommendations being given under three headings:

Eco-Friendly Tips

1. 66 all-natural cleaning solutions
2. 9 things you can do to save water
3. 6 eco-friendly school supplies

Easy Ideas for Going Green

1. Eco-friendly tips
2. Composting 101
3. 6 energy-saving home fixes

Natural Living Tips

1. 10 eco-friendly cleaning products
2. Quiz: What’s more eco-friendly?
3. 7 eco-friendly beauty products

If this is their idea of what is “ultimate” so far as “green” living is concerned, I don’t know how to respond to their list; it takes my breath away in being so misleading! If everyone in the world were to follow their advice, our species would still be doomed!

I assume that the good folks at the Real Simple site “believe in” green living because they are “believers” so far as global warming is concerned. Assuming the correctness of this statement, their solution to the global warming problem—an *individualistic* one, note—is to:

- Change one’s purchasing habits (in, e.g., your purchasing of cleaning solutions and school supplies).
- Conserve—water and energy in particular.
- Compost—advice that is difficult to follow for apartment dwellers!

I do not fault the folks at Real Simple for not having their “hearts in the right place,” for at least they are “believers,” evidently, rather than “deniers.” But their advice evinces an abysmal

ignorance of the seriousness of the global warming that is occurring. Because of that, their recommendations are anything but helpful. Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that they are *dangerous* recommendations, because if people use that group as an authority in responding to the threat of global warming, they are signing their own death warrants. For the Real Simple advice **will not prepare them for the chaos that lies in our future as humans!** Their advice is simple, true, but also **simply wrong!**

What people need to recognize is that if they “*live lightly*”—**but others do not**—their living lightly will not necessarily “cancel out” the *lack* of living lightly by others. If most people lived lightly, with just a few people not doing so, the fact that some were not doing so would be of little or no consequence. The trouble is that most in the “advanced” countries are *not* living lightly—and *that* fact has huge consequences. What? It’s likely to mean that most of the world’s population (90% according to some climate scientists) will be wiped out by global warming in a few decades, if not years—with the possibility, even, that our species will go the way of the dinosaurs, but for different reasons.

One might be tempted to make a *value judgment* regarding this fact that few are living lightly (i.e., it’s “bad” that this is the case), but one must be careful here. What one must recognize is that most people in the “developed” world who are not living lightly are doing so because **they have little choice in the matter**. The way of life that they have is one that is **basically imposed on them by the economic system of the society within which they live**. Those who “operate” and own the economy bear responsibility for that economic system, but “ordinary” people are born into it, and are forced to find some “niche” in the economic system—if they can, that is; for many find themselves unemployed today.

Put another way, the “average” person is “trapped” by the economic system into which s/he was born and raised; s/he has little choice but to *accept* it, and try to *adapt* to it. Therefore, even though one might be able to calculate a “pollution responsibility” value for the average person, that value would be misleading because the average person has little ability to *reduce* that value to an “acceptable” level. Therefore, a negative value judgment applied to the average person, regarding “pollution responsibility,” is misplaced.

The leaders of a society have a more decisive impact on a society than do the average members of the society, so that if a society is a “high energy”/“high per capita pollution” society, it is such individuals who bear the responsibility for that fact. It is *those* individuals who, therefore, should be criticized for the society being one that contributes significantly to the global warming problem.

Little such criticism occurs, however—at least in the sense that such criticism fills the *mass media*. Which fact is not, however, surprising—given that what “makes it” into the mass media is that which corporate and political leaders *want* to appear there. One might think that because such people will be affected by global warming just as the rest of us will be, they would (a) be

alert to what is happening, so far as global warming is concerned, would (b) be concerned about this, and would (c) then act to change the nature of the society's economy in an attempt to address that problem. They *aren't*, however, which likely means that they will be dragging all of down into a chaotic situation, one in which few, if any, will be able to survive.

Why the Real Simple folk are not offering better advice than they are as to how to respond to the problem of global warming is something that I do not know—although my best guess is that the content of their web site is dictated by corporate interests.

Given the control that corporate interests have over the mass media, combined with the fact of their disinterest in global warming (relative to next quarter's "bottom line"), the fact that insofar as there is an answer to the global warming problem—and **there is no satisfactory one!**—it lies in an **eco-community movement**, that fact will never reach the eyes of most people, for that solution will never be presented in the mass media.

This is a sad conclusion to reach, for it means that millions of innocent people will be sacrificed to (the not exactly a "god"!) global warming, when only our leaders *deserve* to be! I wish I knew what, if anything, could be done about this sad fact, but

Science and/vs. Religion

Alton C. Thompson

An article on the [Wikipedia site](#) begins this way:

The **relationship between religion and science** has been a subject of study since [Classical antiquity](#), addressed by philosophers, theologians, scientists, and others. Perspectives from different geographical regions, cultures and historical epochs are diverse, with some characterizing the relationship as one of conflict, others describing it as one of harmony, and others proposing little interaction. The extent to which science and religion may attempt to understand and describe similar phenomena is sometimes referred to as a part of the [demarcation problem](#). (I have added the links.)

In modern times, however, the primary conflict between science and religion originated with the publication of Charles Darwin's [On the Origin of Species](#) in 1859. Christians of that time (*most* of them at any rate, I suspect) believed that different species existed because a supernatural agent—"God"—had created each species separately, and in a short period of time. Darwin, however, argued that species had come into existence through a long process of evolution, and in doing so had a number of predecessors, as [J. Arthur Thomson noted in 1909](#) (and as Darwin himself acknowledged at the beginning of his book). The novelty introduced by Darwin was the "engine" of evolution proposed by Darwin, that of "natural selection."

The hypothesis of "natural selection" (for it is *not* a theory) was stated as follows (from p. 23 of the 1909 edition, link to which is provided above):

In the next chapter [III] the Struggle for Existence amongst all organic beings throughout the world, which inevitably follows from the high geometrical ratio of their increase, will be considered. This is the doctrine of [Thomas] [Malthus](#), applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms. As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurrent struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form. (I have added the link.)

As I have commented on Darwin at length in my [Ringling the Bell for Darwin](#), here I will simply note here that Darwin's use of "inevitably" indicates that his hypothesis was derived through a *reasoning process* (based on the "law" asserted by Malthus) rather than through *observation*. (I feel compelled to add, in fact, that "natural selection," as defined by Darwin, **played no role whatsoever in human evolution**.) Darwin's primary contribution was to bring the *idea* of

evolution before the public, rather than the *explanation* that he offered as to *why* evolution occurs.

The issue that I wish to address in this essay, however, is not whether Darwin was right or wrong, but whether there is a *necessary* conflict between science and religion. More specifically I wish to address a recent statement by Dan Arel, in his “[Neil deGrasse Tyson Squashes Creationist Argument Against Science on National TV](#).” Arel states at one point:

Those like [Jay W.] [Richards](#) [a senior fellow at the [Discovery Institute](#) (DI)], [Ken] [Ham](#) and the creationist lobby will simply stop at nothing to protect the industry they have created. A series like “[Cosmos](#)” will inspire a new young group of future scientists to put down their bibles and pick up “[On the Origin of Species](#).” Countering make-believe with facts will encourage young people to leave church and walk into a science lab, to stop putting money into coffers and instead direct their resources toward research facilities. (I have added the links.)

Arel’s view, evidently, is that science and religion are simply incompatible, so that one must choose one or the other—and cannot choose both. For Arel, the two are mutually exclusive, so that if one accepts science, one cannot embrace any religion, and the converse.

I disagree strongly with Arel on this matter, and believe that the source of Arel’s error in claiming a necessary conflict between science and religion is his failure to recognize the *diversity* that exists under the umbrella “religion.” This is not to say that diversity does not also exist with the sciences also; for example, one important distinction is between *observational* sciences (e.g., Astronomy) and *experimental* ones (e.g., Chemistry). The nature of one’s subject matter strongly influences how one can go about studying it, so that it is not surprising that if one, as a student, takes courses in several *physical* sciences as well as several *social* sciences, one will be exposed to different *research procedures* in each such course that one takes. What *unites* the various sciences, however, is a common desire to obtain *objective* knowledge—i.e., knowledge with “[inter-subjective reliability](#)” (meaning that a number of “qualified” individuals accept X as being “true”).

No such commonality exists with religions, however. With some religions (e.g., [Buddhism](#)) the emphasis is on how one should *conduct one’s life*, with other religions (e.g., [Christianity](#)) some attention is given to that matter, but the emphasis is on accepting a series of “truths”—i.e., there is a *belief orientation*. For example, a common belief with Christians is in the existence of a supernatural Being which they give the name “God”—without, however, typically specifying the *meaning* that they are associating with that word. Thus, although with members of the Society of Friends (i.e., Quakers) “God” *is* thought of in rather definite terms (as that which reveals truths to one’s particular group), with other Christian denominations the meaning given “God” is much less clear. Indeed, it is often highly amorphous!

If one’s religion lacks, or de-emphasizes, a set of beliefs, one should have no difficulty accepting the findings of scientists. Which is *not* to say, though, that one may, at times, have occasion to

question the particular *methodology* used by a scientist or group of scientists. (For example, in studying an abstract concept such as “intelligence”—a concept that must be *operationalized* before empirical analysis can proceed—questions can easily arise as to whether a given researcher operationalized his or her *dependent* variable—and/or some of the *independent* variables used—in a meaningful way.) But in doing so, one in effect asserts that if a “better” methodology had been used, one *would* accept the results thereby obtained.

Even if one’s religion *does* include a set of beliefs, and one believes that those beliefs have scientific merit, *that* fact implies, of course, that one has no problem accepting scientific findings. Furthermore, if one’s religion includes beliefs that are not susceptible to scientific testing—beliefs that one, therefore, must accept on “faith”—again one will (quite possibly, at least) have no problem accepting those beliefs along with scientific findings.

Arel does not seem to realize that diversity exists both *between* and *within* religions, and that given that variety, it is simply foolish to argue—as Arel does—that an impenetrable wall *must* exist between science and religion.

Can “Intelligence” Be Discussed Intelligently?

Alton C. Thompson

Joan Walsh begins [her recent](#) “Meet Paul Ryan’s ‘Inner City Expert’ Who Claims Blacks and Latinos Have Lower IQs” by stating:

I should no longer be shocked at the intellectual dishonesty of [Charles Murray](#), but I am. On Tuesday Murray made a brief reply to his critics, most notably Paul Krugman, who have accused Murray of racism for much of his work, but especially his 1994 book, “[The Bell Curve](#).” Murray rejoined the news cycle last week, when Rep. [Paul Ryan](#) cited him as an expert on poverty and the troubles of “inner city” men, who, in Ryan’s words, are “not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work.” (I added the links.)

Rep. Ryan—“my” Representative in the U. S. Congress, but only in the sense that I live in the district that he (supposedly) “represents”—is from a small city ([Janesville](#)) in southern Wisconsin, and for that reason alone would not be expected to be himself an expert on blacks—in Wisconsin or elsewhere, for that matter. Recognizing this fact, Ryan has looked to a “scholar” named Charles Murray for “expert” views on blacks—Murray being a social science “expert.”

I don’t want to use this essay to attack Ryan, however, nor even the scientific merit of Murray’s “findings.” I do wish to note, however, that when empirical scientists study abstract concepts, they need first to *clarify*, and then *verbalize*, what the concept means for them—and will likely mean for others—as explicitly as possible, and to then proceed to “[operationalize](#)” the concept in a manner that they regard as meaningful.

What “operationalization” might involve with “intelligence” is, first, designing, and then administering, a “test,” the idea here being that the scores thereby obtained can be regarded as surrogates for “intelligence”—i.e., the numerical values thereby obtained will correlate strongly (and positively) with “intelligence.” The problem here is that neither one’s initial attempt at concept clarification, nor one’s particular operationalization of the concept, may be *objective*—i.e., accepted by one’s peers. And even if both *are* so accepted, one’s “peers” may be subject to “[groupthink](#),” so that their judgment is biased.

If one is studying “intelligence” in, e.g., [dolphins](#), the fact that all dolphins have the same way of life has significance for one’s study. (Dolphin “way of life” varies with age and sex, but otherwise is rather uniform from one “school” to another.) Humans, however, are not dolphins. Different *ways of life* prevail in *different* societies, and within a *given* society people vary in their

lifestyles. Thus, here in the United States—where many different lifestyles exist—the sort of intelligence needed to navigate one’s life successfully varies with one’s lifestyle—something over which one has only partial control. What this fact implies is that if an individual living a certain lifestyle were to be removed from his or her residential location and placed at a different location and given a different lifestyle, that person would have a difficult time navigating the new lifestyle—and might fail miserably in trying to do so.

I make no claim to be an expert regarding the intelligence test(s) that is commonly used in this society, but suspect that it is biased toward a certain lifestyle—so that if blacks, on the average, score lower on that test than do whites, the difference reflects *sub-cultural* differences in our population rather than *biological* ones. Charles Murray himself is no more an expert on intelligence testing than I am, so his claim that intelligence testing “proves” that blacks are inferior to whites is suspect for that reason alone. It’s embarrassing for me to admit, therefore, that “my” Congressman—Paul Ryan—is such an ill-informed (unintelligent?!) person that he would look to Murray for “expert” advice on the subject of intelligence! Ryan *is* a college graduate ([Miami University of Ohio](#)), but is an embarrassment to the university from which he graduated.

Even if the intelligence test(s) used in this country *does* yield meaningful results, problems can arise in *explaining* amount of intelligence—which fact has important implications for *how* one perceives one of, e.g., “lower” intelligence and, therefore, how one *behaves*—either as a private individual or public “servant”—relative to that other person.

From a statistical standpoint, a study of the cause(s) of intelligence would use a measure of “intelligence” as the “Y” variable, and a series of other variables as the “explanatory” ones—i.e., the “X” variables. The problem in choosing “X” variables in our society is that the individualistic philosophy/ideology that prevails in our society will tend to cause the researcher who is unaware of that fact (or who is, and *embraces* it!) to choose *individualistic* variables as the explanatory ones. For example, Joan Walsh, in [commenting](#) on Murray’s later [Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010](#) (2012), states that Murray

sadly concludes that rising poverty among whites is due to their sharing the cultural habits he once attributed mainly to blacks, mainly single motherhood and shiftlessness. But like all of Murray’s work, “Coming Apart” is shot through with genetic fatalism, that lower IQ people are on balance lazier, more promiscuous and more crime prone, and that social policy that seeks to help them only encourages them to reproduce, worsening our problems.

(I assume that the “sadness” referred to here is that of Walsh, not that of Murray!)

Thus, Murray, in using as his “X” variables ones that might be labeled as “internal” ones in that he evidently perceives them as manifestations of one’s inherited genetic makeup, reflects the dominance of individualistic thinking in our society. Given that bias, it is not surprising that he then engages in “blame the victim” thinking, and therefore argues against “social policy that [he

argues] seeks to help them [but] only encourages them to reproduce, worsening our problems.” (The fact that Cong. Ryan looks to Murray for his “expert” advice suggests that Ryan also is a “captive” of the individualistic ideology that prevails in our society.)

It is impossible to know for certain whether Murray’s thinking (a) simply reflects the individualistic ideology that prevails in our society—an ideology that he does not recognize, and/or has been unable to escape; (b) reflects racism on his part; or (c) reflects his honest appraisal of the situation as one who is striving to be objective. But whatever the explanation of the nature of his thinking, the fact that he limits his attention, so far as “X” variables are concerned, to “internal” variables indicates that his thinking about race and intelligence is rather superficial.

If Murray is convinced that those who are “crime prone” were born to be crime prone (i.e., are genetically predisposed to criminality), his thinking does not “mesh” well with most criminologists. A [variety of theories](#) exists as to why people engage in criminal behavior, and although most criminologists would not rule out a genetic role (in some cases at least), for most criminals other factors are typically identified as the causal ones of significance.

Those who regard themselves as members of The Tradition (discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 12 – 37 of my [What Are Churches For?](#)) have an orientation to truth-telling, but even more of an orientation to *values*—so that, e.g., they are interested in doing what they can to promote the well-being of *all* of their fellow human beings. Such an orientation would cause them to have little interest in, e.g., “intelligence,” and in making invidious distinctions on that basis, or other bases.

Given such an orientation—differing notably from that of Charles Murray and Paul Ryan!—they would, in learning, e.g., that blacks were more highly represented, proportionally, in the lowest income group than were whites, would be interested in addressing the question: “What can be done to lift *all* of those in that category out of poverty, *irrespective* of race, etc.?” In answering that question, “Tradition” people would ask what they can do, personally, to help other blacks, and also what governmental programs they should support to achieve that objective.

Tradition people would also, however, try to look at the “big picture,” and in doing so would recognize that humankind *per se* is being threatened by global warming at present. In recent months there has been evidence that global warming has begun to raise its ugly head, and this tells them that this is just the beginning—that once the tipping point is reached, we will have only disaster to look forward to.

Tradition people will recognize that (a) it is now too late to halt the continued “progress” of global warming, that (b) government is currently doing nothing significant to address this problem, and is unlikely *ever* to do anything significant anyway (!), so that (c) they must act as individuals to try to “save” themselves and others. As I have argued in previous essays, there are two such “routes” especially, that of becoming a homesteader and that of becoming an eco-

communitarian—with the latter being the preferred option because it would permit the retention of some semblance of civilized existence.

In trying to “save others” my hope is that Tradition people would not define “others” narrowly—as including only others who are as educated as they are, are of the same race, have a similar occupational background, have the same interests, etc. When I became “converted” to the necessity of societal system change as the answer to our various problems in the early 1980s, I also worked out a scenario of how that might occur, and published it as “[*Ecotopia: A ‘Gerendipitous’ Scenario*](#).” As the title implies, the 5-“wave” scenario that I introduced in that article had retirees constituting the first and second “waves.”

Although I have not rejected that scenario, more recently I reached the conclusion that blacks might be the best vanguard of a new society, given the “push” that many of them feel as inmates of the Existing Order, along with the fact that the meager lives that many of them live would prepare them well for the drastic change in “lifestyle” that would be involved with eco-communitarian living. In addition, I thought that the excitement that many of them might feel in being the vanguard of a New Society might “energize” those who chose to participate, thereby making them determined to make their efforts successful.

As a result of the above thinking I have contacted [Will Allen](#) here in Milwaukee, whose “[Growing Power](#)” project is highly relevant for the creation of a New Society, and have also contacted the black aldermanic members of the Milwaukee Common Council, conveying this idea to them. So far I have received no response from either, which makes me disappointed. I guess I just wasn’t “cut out” to be a salesman!

I *do* hope, though, that an eco-communitarian program gets underway—e.g., by the *Fellowship of Intentional Communities* (another group that I have contacted). My fear, however, is that *no* serious effort will be made to “save” our species from extinction—which could conceivably occur before the end of this century—which would be a tragedy!

Ecclesiastes: A Book for Our Time?

Alton C. Thompson

It [has been said](#) of the book of Ecclesiastes that:

Ecclesiastes has had a deep influence on Western literature: American novelist [Thomas Wolfe](#) wrote: "[O]f all I have ever seen or learned, that book seems to me the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man's life upon this earth—and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth. I am not given to dogmatic judgments in the matter of literary creation, but if I had to make one I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound."^[3]

What is some of that “wisdom”?

⁹What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.
Ecclesiastes 1:9

¹⁸For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief.
Ecclesiastes 1:18

¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²² What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²³ All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.
Ecclesiastes 2:17 - 23

¹There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
 a time to mourn and a time to dance,
⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
 a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
 a time to keep and a time to throw away,
⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
 a time to be silent and a time to speak,
⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
 a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 - 8

¹⁹ Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath^[c]; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰ All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. ²¹ Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

Ecclesiastes 3:19 - 20

And the final words in the book:

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd.^[b] ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

¹³ Now all has been heard;
 here is the conclusion of the matter:
 Fear God and keep his commandments,
 for this is the duty of all mankind.
¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment,
 including every hidden thing,
 whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 - 14

As the above quotations indicate, an air of futility pervades the book of Ecclesiastes—and I'm sure that many climate scientists today have that feeling about their research. Such scientists have, true, made some effort to publicize their research findings, but in not *themselves* being publicists find that most people "out there" are not aware of their work, because the mass media do such a poor job of conveying their findings to the public. One would like to think that at least those who report the weather on television are aware of this body of research; but *if* they are, one never hears them *say* anything about it! It seems that insofar as the subject of global warming *does* receives any publicity, it is from global warming "deniers"—who therefore mislead the public about the subject.

This is a tragedy, for an important milestone occurred last year virtually without much notice. As David Biello wrote on May 9, 2013, in the [Scientific American](#) blog:

On May 2, after nightfall shut down photosynthesis for the day in Hawaii, [carbon dioxide levels](#) in the atmosphere touched 400 parts-per-million there for the first time in at least 800,000 years.

• • • • •

The last time CO₂ levels at Mauna Loa were this high, [Homo sapiens](#) did not live there. In fact, the last time CO₂ levels are thought to have been this high was more than 2.5 million years ago, an era known as the [Pliocene](#), when the Canadian Arctic boasted forests instead of icy wastes. The land bridge connect North America and South America had recently formed. The globe's temperature averaged about 3 degrees C warmer, and sea level lapped coasts 5 meters or more higher [25 m per [this source](#)].

[I have no explanation for why he *first* says “800,000 years,” and shortly after that says “2.5 million years ago,” and says “5 meters” rather than 25!]

Per [this article](#) on the Pliocene:

In North America, [rodents](#), large [mastodons](#) and [gomphotheres](#), and [opossums](#) continued successfully, while hoofed animals ([ungulates](#)) declined, with [camel](#), [deer](#) and [horse](#) all seeing populations recede. [Rhinos](#), three toed horses ([Nannippus](#)), [oreodonts](#), [protoceratids](#), and [chalicotheres](#) went extinct. [Borophagine dogs](#) and [Agriotherium](#) went extinct, but other [carnivores](#) including the [weasel](#) family diversified, and [dogs](#) and fast-running hunting [bears](#) did well. [Ground sloths](#), huge [glyptodonts](#), and [armadillos](#) came north with the formation of the Isthmus of Panama.

Africa was dominated by hoofed animals, and primates continued their evolution, with [australopithecines](#) (some of the first [hominids](#)) appearing in the late Pliocene. Rodents were successful, and elephant populations increased. Cows and antelopes continued diversification and overtaking [pigs](#) in numbers of species. Early [giraffes](#) appeared, and camels migrated via Asia from North America. Horses and modern rhinos came onto the scene. Bears, dogs and weasels (originally from North America) joined cats, hyenas and [civets](#) as the African predators, forcing hyenas to adapt as specialized scavengers.

Our distant ancestors—the *australopithecines*—began appearing toward the end of the Pliocene, but their world was very different from ours today—the global mean temperature being about 3° C. warmer than today, with sea level about 82 feet higher! Now the fact that our *distant ancestors* were able to live in this sort of environment might suggest that *we moderns* could as well. What must be kept in mind, however, is that (a) our distant ancestors had a way of life that differed substantially from ours—a way of life that we moderns would have difficulty adjusting to; (b) the total number of australopithecines in the world was extremely small relative to the current world population, so that it was easily supportable by the environment then existing; and

(c) the world that we are living in today—i.e., the ecosystem of which we are a part—has not *adjusted* to the 400 ppm level, and *will* not for some time—especially given that we continue to pour carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, so that the ppm level will *continue* to climb.

The fact that Earth’s ecosystem has not yet adjusted to a 400 ppm level is, in particular, of extreme significance, because the *adjustment process* will by no means be a smooth process—as we have been learning recently with “monster” storms, extreme weather, severe drought in places (with accompanying problems with fires), etc., problems that can be expected to become “progressively” more severe over time. This transition to a new equilibrium may be so chaotic that our species may become extinct long before the transition is complete: Many species are currently becoming extinct, and there is no assurance that *our own* species won’t soon join that group.

The current issue of *Scientific American* carries an article with the ominous title “[Earth Will Cross the Climate Danger Threshold by 2036](#)” by Michael E. Mann. Mann—Director of the Pennsylvania State University Earth System Science Center, and author of [Dire Predictions](#) (2008) and [The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars](#) (2012)—stated in his article:

I recently calculated hypothetical future temperatures by plugging different ECS [[equilibrium climate sensitivity](#)] values into a so-called energy balance model, which scientists use to investigate possible climate scenarios. The computer model determines how the average surface temperature responds to changing natural factors, such as volcanoes and the sun, and human factors—greenhouse gases, aerosol pollutants, and so on. (Although climate models have critics, they reflect our best ability to describe how the climate system works, based on physics, chemistry and biology. And they have a proved [i.e., proven] track record: for example, the actual warming in recent years was accurately predicted by the models decades ago.)

I then instructed the model to project forward under the assumption of business-as-usual greenhouse gas emissions. I ran the model again and again, for ECS values ranging from the IPCC's lower bound (1.5 degrees C) to its upper bound (4.5 degrees C). The curves for an ECS of 2.5 degrees and three degrees C fit the instrument readings most closely. The curves for a substantially lower (1.5 degrees C) and higher (4.5 degrees C) ECS did not fit the recent instrumental record at all, reinforcing the notion that they are not realistic.

To my wonder, I found that for an ECS of three degrees C, our planet would cross the dangerous warming threshold of two degrees C in 2036, only 22 years from now. When I considered the lower ECS value of 2.5 degrees C, the world would cross the threshold in 2046, just 10 years later [see graph on pages 78 and 79 (which are not included in the online version of this article)].

Mann ends his article on a note of cautious optimism:

Let us hope that a lower climate sensitivity of 2.5 degrees C turns out to be correct. If so, it offers cautious optimism. It provides encouragement that we can avert irreparable harm to our planet. That is, if—and only if—we accept the urgency of making a transition away from our reliance on fossil fuels for energy.

Note the all-important “if” here. If we are realistic about this matter of “urgency,” we will conclude that our leaders—in either the political or corporate realm—are evincing no sense of urgency regarding “transitioning,” so that there is every reason to believe that in 20 years or so the changes that are already occurring will accelerate, making life difficult, if not impossible, for most humans, with the strong possibility that our species will become extinct in short order.

Indeed, one climate scientist has gone on record as stating that he is *certain* that our species is on



the road to extinction. Guy R.

McPherson—who has the “[Nature Bats Last](#)” web site—in his [Going Dark](#) (2013) states (Introduction), e.g.,

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

He then lists, and discusses, three reasons why he believes we are headed for

extinction:

- “global climate change”
- “environmental collapse”
- “nuclear meltdown”

As his last point especially needs clarification, let me quote here what McPherson says about this matter:

Safely shuttering a nuclear power plant requires a decade or two of careful planning. Far sooner, we’ll complete the ongoing collapse of the industrial economy. This is a source of my nuclear nightmares.

When the world’s 440 or so nuclear power plants melt down catastrophically, we’ve entered an extinction event. Think clusterfukushima, raised to the power of a hundred or so. Ionizing radiation could, and probably will, destroy most terrestrial organisms and, therefore, most marine and freshwater organisms. That, by the way includes the most unique, special, intelligent animal on Earth [i.e., us!]

I assume that McPherson, in referring to humans as the “most intelligent animal,” did so “[tongue in cheek](#),” for he later says:

Again, I invoke the wisdom of George Carlin: “When you’re born into this world, you’re given a ticket to the freak show. If you’re born in America you get a front row seat.” (!)

The writer of Ecclesiastes was wrong in stating that “there is nothing new under the sun,” for the global warming that is occurring now *is* something new in our history. But were he living today, and aware of that global warming, I believe that he would have the same sense of futility that comes through in McPherson’s *Going Dark*. But would he offer the same advice?: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.” He might! In studying the relevant research, he might very well conclude that the only thing worth doing any more, under the circumstances, is to try to be one’s “brother’s keeper” and wait for the inevitable.

Inequality and Other Problems

Alton C. Thompson

An important feature of United States society at present is growing inequality in income. In fact, the [Congressional Budget Office](#) (CBO)

finds that over the past three decades, a growing fraction of income has gone to the top of the income distribution (see first graph). The top fifth saw its share of pretax income rise from 43 percent in 1979 to more than 50 percent in 2010. Much of the gain went to the top 1 percent, whose share increased from 9 percent to 15 percent over that period.

In contrast, households in the bottom two quintiles saw their income shares drop. The poorest 20 percent collected just 5.1 percent of pretax income in 2010, down from 6.2 percent in 1979. Households in the second quintile suffered a bigger decline—from 11.2 percent to 9.6 percent over the period.

Even *The Economist* has shown [some concern](#) about this:

Although some degree of inequality is good for an economy [a *capitalist* one, in particular!], creating incentives to work hard and take risks, the recent concentration of income gains among the most affluent is both politically dangerous and economically damaging. The political worry is a descent into angry populism

Why should growing inequality be considered a problem—besides the possibility of an “angry populism” arising? It never occurs to most commentators that if those who had much would share with those who have little, inequality in income would not be a problem. Most commentators tacitly assume, however, that humans are “naturally” self-seeking and selfish, so that there is no reason to expect that those with much should be expected to share with those with little. They tacitly assume that we humans are “programmed” to “look after No. 1,” so that even when those who are fabulously wealthy engage in charitable activity, their purpose in doing so is to enhance their own status in the society rather than to help the recipients of their charity.

What commentators tend not to realize is that their beliefs about “human nature” stem from their experience of how our society “operates,” those beliefs having been reinforced by certain “scholarly” works (going back at least to Charles Darwin’s [The Origin of Species](#), 1859) that seemingly provide “definitive” support for those views. If these individuals knew more about human history in “the long haul,” however, they would know that there is nothing “natural” about being selfish.

Robin Clarke and Geoffrey Hindley, e.g., in their [*The Challenges of the Primitives*](#) (1975) note that (p. 162):

Primitive practices differ crucially from our own in the expectation that the man of wealth will distribute his largesse to those less well off.

[Note that “primitive” is not used here in an invidious sense but, rather, used to refer to our ancestors, whose way of life was based on gathering and hunting, and on those modern people who we have not yet killed (!) who still have such a way of life.]

They go on to make the important point that (p. 166):

Those who criticize enlightened plans for social innovation as unattainable would do well to remember that such systems have existed, and worked, on most of the Earth throughout most of history.

What should be noted here is that if the term “natural” is to be applied to *any* way of life, it would be one centered on gathering and hunting. As our species was evolving from our [*Homo*](#) genus ancestor, a co-development was occurring between our biology and our way of life—so that our way of life “fit” our biology and our biology, in turn, “fit” our way of life.

With the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago, ways of life began to change while our biology did not, because it *could* not change at the same pace as our ways of life. There therefore grew an increasing discordance between our biology and ways of life, that discordance having a number of consequences, including for human health—as Noel T. Boaz argues in his [*Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making Us Sick*](#) (2002).

Clarke and Hindley are right to (tacitly) criticize those “who criticize enlightened plans for social innovations” Those writers should have added two points, however. First, Christianity—the dominant religion in the United States—is ostensibly based on the teachings of Jesus, who is quoted in [*Matthew 25:31 – 45*](#) as saying:

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

What’s abundantly clear from this passage is the message that to be a follower of Jesus is attend to the needs of those with various needs—a message repeated *four times* for emphasis! Yet, the fact that the rich in this country are niggardly in their giving—this country in which church attendance is emphasized¹—is proof positive that the Christian churches have failed miserably in their mission. Rather than being *agents* of societal change, they have come merely to *reflect* the Larger Society—and act as agents for wittingly or unwillingly simply *reinforcing* the thrust of the Larger Society.

Were the churches in this country to “do their job” in promoting the values attributed to Jesus in the canonical gospels, they might lose members. But it is a pathetic commentary to make regarding the churches that that is their primary concern—that their aim is to be like any other business in “staying in business”!

A second point that Clarke and Hindley should have added is that there are “enlightened plans for social innovation” and then there are “enlightened plans for social innovation.” That is, not all such plans are equal.

What must be recognized about a societal system is the fact that it *is* a *system*—which fact means that it is not merely a collection of parts, but those parts are *integrally related* one with another. This does not mean that a societal system functions as a perfectly-operating machine, for modern societal systems in particular contain contradictory elements. But with our *current* societal system such elements are of little importance, and therefore pose little or no threat to the system. (This situation may, however, *change* in the near future!)

¹ Which doesn’t mean, however, that church attendance is *high*! It [has been found](#) that on the average weekend only 17.7% of the population attends a Christian church.

The “liberals” in our society (I assume that there *are* still a few!) are people who perceive problems in the society, and propose to “fix” those problems by advancing, and getting enacted, governmental programs. The problem with liberals, however, is that in being individuals who are embedded comfortably in the Existing Order, they have no interest in *replacing* the Existing Order with a new one. Therefore, the “fixes” that they advocate will not *change* the Existing Order because they are not *designed* so to do. Their ideas and actions may not be consciously *thought of* by liberals that way, but that is their *net effect*.

Because their proposals, if enacted, do not involve any substantial change in the Existing Order—the *ultimate* cause of the problem(s) that ostensibly concern them—the programs involved fail to solve the problem(s) at which they are directed. At most, they provide some alleviation.

The only *actual* solution to our various societal problems—including that of inequality—is societal system change, and in previous essays I have discussed an eco-communitarian movement as a vehicle for bringing about such change—a movement that would have as its principle that “the only real threat to the American economy is self-sufficiency” (Eugene Linden, [*Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies*](#), 1979, p. 176).

Another principle that should be followed by such a movement is to recognize that we humans acquired certain “design specifications” in our evolution (see pp. 38 – 177 in [this](#)), that a way of life in accord with those design specifications would be—unlike what exists now—a “natural” one and, therefore, a way of life that should be sought. In striving to achieve such a way of life (a “return,” in a sense), especial attention should be given to approximating the *institutions* that characterized “primitive” life (recognizing, of course, that different such groups had different sets of institutions).

One would think that the Christian churches would be interested in advancing the eco-communitarian cause, given its “obvious” relationship to the teachings attributed to Jesus. However, evidently no one in leadership positions within that religion is aware of the connection between the two—a pathetic comment on the religion!

Such a movement *could*, conceivably, solve the inequality problem (for those participating in it), among other social problems, while moving those participating in it in the direction of a more “natural” way of life. But unless such a movement would *also* attend to the problem of global warming facing us humans at present, global warming will squelch it.

What’s particularly unfortunate, however, is that *even if* eco-communities *are* designed with the threat of global warming in mind, they may be swept away by global warming anyway. Still, such a program would at least give those participating in it a *chance* to survive the ravages that global warming will be inflicting (even more!) on us humans. For that reason, I remain hopeful that such a movement will get initiated.

Clueless in Milwaukee

Alton C. Thompson

Although my title here parallels the title of the movie [*Sleepless in Seattle*](#), no allusion to that movie is intended here. And by referring to “cluelessness” in Milwaukee, there is no intention on my part to suggest that cluelessness is *unique* to Milwaukee—for such is by no means the case: Cluelessness is a pervasive feature of our society. Why, then, “pick” on Milwaukee? For the simple reason that I live in the Milwaukee urban area, and a recent example of cluelessness occurred here that struck me as representative of the cluelessness that prevails in our society.

This is a “season” of the year referred to as “[March madness](#)” (or “Big Dance”), because of the men’s basketball tournament currently underway, involving 64 teams belonging to the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) (NCAA). This year teams from both the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee were among the 64 teams that qualified for the tournament, with the former being (so far, as I write this on March 25, 2014) being one of the “survivors,” and thus one of the “sweet 16” (i.e., one of the 16 teams still remaining in the tournament).

Another local university with a Division I basketball team is Marquette University, whose team (coached by Al Maguire) became the [national champion in 1977](#) by beating my *alma mater* (M.A., ’65), the University of North Carolina. The Marquette team was good enough last year to be in the NCAA basketball tournament, but failed to make the tournament this year.

For that or some other reason, the team’s coach (since 2008), [Brent “Buzz” Williams](#), announced a few days ago that he was leaving Marquette (which plays in the “Big East” conference) for Virginia Tech (which plays in the more prestigious Atlantic Coast Conference, ACC).

The fact of Williams’s leaving has been the “big news” locally in recent days, and there has been a “[buzz](#)” about who will replace Williams. Although [Marquette University](#) is associated with the Roman Catholic church (the [Jesuit](#) order specifically), and has had some noted theologians ([Daniel Maguire](#) comes to *my* mind, especially), the “fact that Marquette spends more money on men’s basketball than anybody in the country except Duke” [1] University, suggests that its governing value system is more “American” than “Jesuan.”

That is, like most “religious” universities in the United States, Marquette has become thoroughly “domesticated.” The *belief system* associated with Marquette may differ substantially with that associated with, e.g., [Liberty University](#); the *value system* associated with the university, however, is basically “all-American” in valuing and promoting individual “success” especially (but obtained *honestly*, of course), usually defined in materialistic terms.

This is not to say, of course, that the values associated with sports such as basketball are evil. It has been argued, for example, that [through sports](#) one can:

- Acquire an appreciation for an active lifestyle,
- Develop a positive self-concept by mastering sport skills,
- Learn how to work as part of a team,
- Learn about managing success and disappointment,
- Learn about fair play and being a good sport, and
- Learn respect for others

What such an argument ignores, however, is that the *competition* that is an integral part of sports has negative as well as positive aspects, with the former perhaps overshadowing the latter—as, e.g., Alfie Kahn argues in [this paper](#) and his book [No Contest: The Case Against Competition](#) (1986). As Kahn notes in the first chapter of his book, being “No. 1” is an obsession in this country. “Thus it is [he notes on p. 3] that Vince Lombardi’s [2] famous comment—‘Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing’—must be understood not merely as the expression of one football coach’s fanaticism, but as a capsule description of our entire culture.”

Sports emphasize individual—and team—achievement over all other values, whereas the values associated with Jesus (as stated, e.g., in [Matthew 25:31 – 46](#)) were feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, inviting strangers in, clothing the naked, looking after the sick, and visiting those in prison. Perhaps I need new glasses, but I see nowhere in that passage an extolling of either individual or team sports! Of course, one *can* spend some of one’s time to, e.g., feeding the hungry while also spending time preparing for, and engaging in, sporting events. The likelihood, however, given the pressures that sports put on one, is that one will choose sports over following Jesus.

What’s particularly ironic about Marquette and other Catholic universities, along with Catholic coach Vince Lombardi, is that a valuing of competition—insofar as it has its roots in *religious* thinkers—owes more to the theological systems of [Martin Luther](#) and [John Calvin](#) [3] than it does to Catholic theology! But this is understandable: As I stated earlier, most Catholics in this country have become thoroughly “domesticated,” in that the gods that they primarily worship are [individualism](#) and “[free market](#)” [ideology](#)—with sports being an integral part of the mix.

If cluelessness exists in Milwaukee from a *religious* standpoint—both in the sense that a valuing of competition is “unJesuan” and in that many Catholics fail to realize that their values have a more solidly Protestant basis than Catholic one—that cluelessness is by no means unique to Milwaukee. The more *important* cluelessness here and elsewhere, however, is that regarding the threat posed by global warming.

Prof. [Guy R. McPherson](#)—who has the [Nature Bats Last](#) website—notes in an [article](#) he wrote for the website that we humans are on course for a 4° C. increase [4] in the global mean temperature as a result of our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, and that

If you're too busy to read the evidence presented below, here's the bottom line: On a planet 4 C hotter than baseline, all we can prepare for is human extinction (from [Oliver Tickell's 2008 synthesis in the Guardian](#)). Tickell is taking a conservative approach, considering humans have not been present at 3.5 C above baseline (i.e., the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, commonly accepted as 1750). According to the [World Bank's 2012 report](#), "Turn down the heat: why a 4°C warmer world must be avoided" and an [informed assessment](#) of "BP Energy Outlook 2030" put together by Barry Saxifrage for the *Vancouver Observer*, our path leads directly to the 4 C mark. The 19th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 19), held in November 2013 in Warsaw, Poland, was warned by professor of climatology Mark Maslin: "We are already planning for a 4°C world because that is where we are heading. I do not know of any scientists who do not believe that." Adding to planetary misery is a [paper in the 16 December 2013 issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences concluding](#) that 4 C terminates the ability of Earth's vegetation to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Karen Garcia [noted recently](#) that

If CNN devoted even a hundredth as much time covering our hijacked economy as it does [covering that missing airplane](#), we might just be getting somewhere and afflicting the comfortable. But, since a marathon reality show featuring an international scavenger hunt with overtones of terror, intrigue, and anguish is proving to be a ratings magnet, the most trusted name in news is only too happy to sate our appetites.

I am in full agreement with Garcia that our media tend to devote far too much attention to serious matters that affect just a *few* (to say nothing of trivia, such as sports!), while ignoring problems such as [unemployment](#), which affect *millions* in our society. But even Garcia seems to be blind to the fact that our society—we as humans, in fact—are on a disaster course. Perhaps Garcia has read McPherson's recent [Going Dark](#) (2013), and agrees with him that we humans are doomed to extinction—so why bother with trying to "save" ourselves. [5] I would bet my next paycheck, however, that Garcia has never even heard of McPherson!

McPherson and other climate scientists who have predicted that just as many species are now going extinct, so may ours in a few decades, or even years, may turn out to be right. I prefer to think, however, that "[it's not over until it's over](#)," and that we should recognize that (a) although "runaway" may be inevitable (perhaps beginning no later than 2036 [6]), (b) it may be possible to "save" at least some humans by (c) initiating, ASAP, an [eco-communitarian](#) program, (d) the communities in that program being designed with the ravages of global warming in mind, (e)

drawing in part on ideas developed right here in Milwaukee by [Will Allen](#) and others (and given the name “[Growing Power](#)”).

The press—here in Milwaukee and elsewhere—*could* be promoting this idea, but I will not hold my breath waiting for that to happen! After all, sports are more important than is global warming—for the obvious reason that sports will sell more newspapers! As a result, most people in Milwaukee—and elsewhere in this country—will remain clueless as to the threat posed by global warming, and most (if not all!) will probably be its victims.

Endnotes

1. Michael Hunt, “[Time for Marquette to take a big shot with search](#),” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 24, 2014.
2. [Lombardi](#) is “best known as the head coach of the [Green Bay Packers](#) during the 1960s, where he led the team to three straight and five total [National Football League](#) championships in seven years, including winning the first two [Super Bowls](#) following the [1966](#) and [1967 NFL](#) seasons.”
3. A point argued in, e.g., [Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*](#) (1905) and [Richard H. Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*](#) (1926).
4. To date (since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution—i.e., around 1750 CE) the global mean has increased by about [0.8° C.](#), but the “[climate commitment](#)” value is between 1° C. and 1.5° C.
5. McPherson states in the Introduction to this book: “Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.”
6. The allusion here is to an article by Michael E. Mann in the current issue of *Scientific American*, having the ominous title “[Earth Will Cross the Climate Danger Threshold by 2036](#).”

The Pentagon and Global Warming

Alton C. Thompson

D. H. Garrett [noted recently](#) that the admiral of the U. S. Pacific Fleet stated, in an interview last year, that “climate change” was the “security threat” that most concerned him. Garrett added that the secretary of state recently compared climate change to a weapon of mass destruction. However, “a reading of the Quadrennial Defense Review,” concluded Garrett, “shows a security establishment largely devoted to being able to react to the effects of climate change (failed states, resource wars, humanitarian disasters) rather than pre-emptively attack the cause.”

Now if the United States Department of Defense (DOD) believes that *reacting* to the “effects of climate change” would *only* involve addressing problems that occur **outside of our borders** (how else is one to interpret the three points listed above?!), its leaders are even more deluded than I had thought; they are ignorant beyond belief.

Perhaps their problem is that to keep up to date in their thinking—or at least give the *impression* that they are!—they have begun using the term “climate change” rather than “global warming.” If so, they apparently fail to realize that “climate change” is now being used as a *substitute* for “global warming” (i.e., as having the same *meaning* as “global warming”), so that “climate change” is as much a *global* phenomenon as is “global warming”!!

If “climate change” is a **global** phenomenon (which it *is*, of course!), it follows that global warming—or “climate change,” if you prefer—is, and will be, occurring not only *outside* of our borders, but *within* our borders as well—is and will be, that is, occurring on a **global scale**! Its *effects* will, of course, vary from one part of the world to another. But being a *global* phenomenon, its effects will be felt *everywhere*—a fact that any fourth grader would be able to comprehend.

There is, though, another possible explanation for the [Pentagon](#)’s position on this matter. That (a) a certain *culture* has developed in the DOD over the years, (b) employees who have not adopted the tenets of that culture have been weeded out once their “deviancy” became clear, so that (c) a uniformity of thought now dominates thinking in the DOD—the result being that its employees *reinforce* one another in a certain way of thinking. A further result being that as a *need* for changes in thinking occurs, it fails to occur—thereby becoming increasingly “out of touch” with current realities.

Put another way, a mode of thinking tends to develop in the Pentagon that is highly resistant to change, with only some sort of exterior “jolt” causing re-thinking, and the consequent development of a more realistic perspective in that “empire.”

My explanation, as offered above, seemingly deviates, however, from the one suggested by Garrett—whose concern seems to be not that the DOD is reacting *inappropriately* to global warming but, rather, is not “pre-emptively attack[ing] the cause.”

Garrett adds that

This is perhaps not completely surprising given that the US military is the world's largest (non-nation state) GHG polluter. Given, moreover, high-level US support for shale gas and record levels of coal exports (not to mention Keystone XL), even the secretary of state's words, if interpreted in the light of deeds, would indicate that the United States supports an even-more-destructive level of a "climate change weapon of mass destruction."

What Garrett seems to be suggesting, then, is that the DOD and State Department either:

- Are both *ignorant* of the fact that global warming (along with the various possible effects of that warming), so that the DOD is not aware of its role as a polluter, and the State Department is not aware of the government's actions that are facilitating increased pollution; or
- Both *know* that global warming is occurring, and are being *irresponsible* in not making an effort to reduce pollution, and are even facilitating it out of *self-interest* (in the Pentagon's case, at least). Are, that is, engaging in criminal activity that is not legally of a criminal nature.

The above discussion raises the question: What *should* we expect from the military in the face of global warming?

- That it *react* in an appropriate fashion relative to the global warming that is occurring?
- That it act *pro-actively* with reference to that problem?
- That it do *both*?

In answering this “expectation” question, it is useful to begin by recognizing that the DOD is a part of the executive branch of government, headed by the Secretary of Defense who, in turn, answers to the Chief Executive, the President of the United States. Although the President has certain Constitutional powers, as the Chief Executive he is charged—as the word “execute” itself implies—with *executing* the directives decided upon by the U. S. Congress (with its House of Representatives and Senate), rather than *creating* policy directives.

Given the DOD's position in the national government, the appropriate answer to the above three questions, then, is “None of the above!” Congress is empowered to decide *policy* for the DOD, with the Chief Executive deciding how that policy should be *implemented*. In practice, the Chief

Executive may relinquish much of this authority to department heads, but the *ultimate* responsibility for deciding how policy should be implemented still lies with the Chief Executive—although Congress may give certain directions to the Chief Executive that restrict that person’s decision-making, so far as implementation is concerned.

It should be noted that the [Quadrennial Defense Review](#) (QDR) itself is prepared by the DOD, having been mandated by the U. S. Congress’s 1997 [National Defense Authorization Act](#) (NDAA). Although *prepared* by the DOD, the fact that it is *mandated* by Congress means that it is done for the benefit of the members of Congress. Whether they examine the Review critically or simply accept the assessments and recommendations presented in the Review is up to Congress, of course. (Congress has, however, tended to give the Executive Branch a “free rein”—in large part, seemingly, because “neo-liberalism” (internally) and imperialism (externally) have taken over both of our major political parties at the highest levels.)

Although the Quadrennial Defense Review is done for the benefit of Congress, it is available to those *not* in politics—as indicated by the fact that Garrett has commented on it. It’s good to see that some private individuals, such as Garrett (formerly a State Department employee), take an interest in the Review; what’s unfortunate regarding Garrett’s comments, however, is that they evince:

- No recognition of the nature of the threat posed by global warming.
- A lack of recognition of the DOD’s role—*official* role, at any rate!—in policy-making.

So far as the recommendations of the DOD, in its QDR, are judged to be ignorant, self-serving, etc., however, this reflects not only problems in the DOD, but in the Executive Branch in general, as well as in Congress.

A rather depressing conclusion to reach!

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

Another Reason for Societal System Change

Alton C. Thompson

[Subhankar Banerjee](#), in his recent “[On Climate Impasse: Appetite and Substitutes](#),” asserts that Progress is “a paradox. Progress is as real as an apple, and it can also hold contradictions.” Why? Because, Banerjee explains, Progress increases “the quality of life for some, while [it] degrades or destroys the same for others.” It is also the case, he adds, that in some cases Progress “simultaneously improves and degrades the quality of life for the same individual.”

The “Progress” referred to here by Banerjee here is the technological development—combined with, and motivated by, to a degree, greed—which has produced our consumer society. His interest in that development stems from the fact that the production and transportation that makes a consumer society possible has been on the backs of fossil fuels, the burning of such fuels resulting in an increased “greenhouse effect.”

Banerjee adds:

Our daily life—from brushing teeth in the morning, to brushing teeth at night, before going to bed—is profoundly dependent on petroleum products and byproducts. . . . While we can certainly substitute some aspects of our lives with “clean, alternative technologies” . . . , it is impossible for us to extrude ourselves from petroleum) . . .—unless we fundamentally change how we live.”

That is, societal system change is the only real answer to the pollution problem.

Banerjee notes, and expresses agreement with, an essay (“How Much Should a Country Consume?”) written several decades ago by economist John Kenneth Galbraith, to the effect that “appetite” is the ultimate cause of our excess consumption, so that efforts at increasing efficiency, finding substitutes, etc. “miss the boat” so far as solving the excess consumption problem is concerned—given that it is “appetite” that is the *ultimate* “driver.”

If “appetite” is the ultimate driver, should the emphasis be on *reducing* it?—the result then being reduced consumption and, therefore (assuming the continuation of the use of fossil fuels), a reduced emission of greenhouse gases.

That’s what Banerjee seems to suggest, but what that suggestion ignores is that societies are *systems*, so that their various components not only interact one with another, but do so in a somewhat *harmonious* way. Some conflict exists in any human societal system, and as societal change occurs, some sectors lag behind others. Generally speaking, however, the various “parts” of a human societal system work together reasonably well—and are mutually supportive.

Banerjee himself had said (see above) that the only way to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels is to “fundamentally change how we live”—and I agree with him on this point. Where I disagree with Banerjee is that he seems to argue that societal system change must be accomplished by *first* reducing appetites—as if this can be done *in the context* of the Existing Order. My view is that that is not possible—given that societies are systems.

I concluded in the early 1980s that the only answer to various of our problems was societal system change, and in 1984 I [presented a strategy](#) for achieving that transformation. That strategy (which has not been implemented—needless to say!) was (a) based on the principle, stated by Eugene Linden ([Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies](#), 1979, p. 176), that “the only real threat to the American economy is self-sufficiency,” along with (b) the fact that diversity exists within the population—enough diversity to enable societal system change to be a reality.

What the strategy involved was the creation, and proliferation, of self-sufficient communities, in terms of five “waves,” each composed of a certain segment of the population. As I had taken a course on Population while a student at the University of North Carolina (and had therefore studied migration theory), I referred to the strategy as a “push-pull-push-pull-drag” strategy!

My reasons, in 1984, for proposing a strategy for societal system change were largely of a *sociological* nature, Sociology having been my “minor” (and Geography my “major”) while a student at UNC. Since then, however, I have gained an interest in human “design specifications” (see [this](#), pp. 38 – 117) and—more recently—in global warming, so that I would now add that any communities created in an effort to implement my strategy should also take those two factors into consideration.

Although in my discussion of the New Word Fellowship (see [this](#), pp. 37 -75) I gave decision-making a key role (unlike in my earlier discussion of “design specifications”), I failed to emphasize its importance in that eBook. Psychologist [Michael Bader](#), however, has, in a recent article, made me realize more fully the importance of being able to *use* our decision-making ability.

Bader notes the fact that modern society allows little room for decision-making by most, and [states that](#) “The toxic result of this increasingly intolerable system of phone queues, Muzak, and long waits is helplessness”—which, he adds, “is the most destructive of human emotions.”

There are numerous reasons why the Existing Order is in need of replacement, and we can add the squelching of a fundamental human need—that of being able to make decisions that affect one’s life—to the list. The only question is whether a move to replace the Existing Order can occur *soon* enough to “save” at least a few people!

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

Unbelievable—but True!

Alton C. Thompson

In 2008, Royal Dutch Shell developed two sophisticated climate-risk scenarios called Blueprints and Scramble. The first modeled a greener future while the latter predicted—due to government inaction—a future of droughts, floods, heat waves and super storms. By 2012, Shell executives confided to [McKenzie] Funk "[1] We've gone to Scramble. This is a Scramble kind of world. This is what we're doing." Another Shell official opined "I will be one of those persons cheering for an endless summer in Alaska."

So states Gary Olson near the beginning of his "[Profiting from Climate Change](#)." When I read words such as those above, I ask myself: "Why is it that the people who have so much power over us are *also* people who are intent on killing not just us, but *themselves*?" I find it virtually impossible to believe that there are people in this world with minds so deranged that that are seemingly unable to comprehend the fact that their actions may contribute to the demise of our species—*yet such people exist*! Such people are the equivalent of suicide bombers on a ship who, in blowing up the ship, kill everyone on board, including themselves—the difference being, of course, that suicide bombers *know* that they are "sacrificing" themselves for a larger cause, whereas the "Scramble" folk are guided by ideology, and a focus on short-run profits—and have no inkling, seemingly, that their activities are of a sacrificial nature (but for what *cause*?!).

Economist John Maynard Keynes [famously said](#), years ago, that "In the long run we are all dead." For members of the "Scramble" crowd, however, only the *short-run* exists; for them, *historical* time—including a *long run*—has no meaning. The intellectual world that they live in—insofar as it warrants the label



"intellectual"!—is one that differs substantially from the intellectual world that *most* of us live in. This difference would not be a problem if such people lacked influence. As it is, however, they are helping put not only *themselves* (unwittingly, one would like to believe), but *our entire species*, in danger of extinction. The "Scramble" folk remind me of the picture, in the movie [Dr. Strangelove](#), of [Slim Pickens riding a bomb](#)!

What I wish is that there were a lawyer out there some place who would have the creativity to develop a *legal* case against those here and elsewhere who are engaging in activities that warrant the label "criminal" ([against humanity](#), in fact) but are not so recognized *currently* by the courts.

[2] These people must be *stopped* before it is too late (assuming that it isn't already too late!),

and I am at my “wit’s end” coming up with a solution to this problem. At present, this is the only solution that occurs to me.

More and more we are seeing articles on the internet on global warming—the most recent ones spurred by the recent [IPCC](#) (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report—such as [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), and [this](#). Such articles are valuable for educating those who read them, but few of those who read them (apparently) are decision-makers having the power to move societies in a different direction. For that reason, what’s needed is not more of articles of this nature but *actions* that will bring to a halt those activities which are posing a threat to our continued existence as a species—e.g., *legal* actions.

What must occur, of course, is for *positive* actions—in moving away from fossil fuels—to take place while the *negative* activities are being halted. The science and technology exist that would enable renewable sources like [sun](#) and [wind](#) to provide all of the energy humanity needs—so that it is at least *conceivable* that a switchover to such energy sources could be accomplished rapidly. Accomplished, that is, in time to avert disaster.

It would, however, take *political will* for that to occur—and I suspect that such will would arise only if the courts would declare as criminal the production of fossil fuels, so that our politicians would be *forced* to act. I realize that this assumes that our politicians live in the same intellectual world as most of us do—rather than that of the “Scramble” people—which assumption is a rather generous one! It is, however, an assumption that I must make.

Endnote

1. Funk is the author of the recently-published (2014) [Windfall](#). Veteran journalist Funk “traveled the globe for six years, following the money in twenty-four countries to profile ‘hundreds of people who felt climate change would make them rich.’”
2. Here is a statement that appears in Sheridan Jobbins’s [review](#) of William Nordhaus’s [The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World](#) (2013): “CO2 is a pollutant as defined by the Supreme Court of the United States. ‘Greenhouse gases fit well within the Clean Air Act’s capacious definition of air pollutant.’” This gives me some hope that my suggestion here is one that could actually be implemented. Also see [this](#).

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

Responding to the “None” Phenomenon

Alton C. Thompson

Here are several interesting facts regarding religion in the United States today:

- David T. Olson, Director of church planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church (covchurch.org), in a [study of church attendance](#) at Christian churches, found that “the actual rate of church attendance from head counts is less than half of the 40% the pollsters report. Numbers from actual counts of people in Orthodox Christian churches (Catholic, mainline and evangelical) show that in 2004, 17.7% of the population attended a Christian church on any given weekend.” In addition: “Another study published in 2005 in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* by sociologists C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler—known for their scholarly research on the Church—backs up his findings. Their report reveals that the actual number of people worshipping each week is closer to Olson’s 17.7% figure—52 million people instead of the pollster-reported 132 million (40%).” It’s evident, then, that at least with church attendance people lie to pollsters!
- Olson’s study adds that “While America’s churches as a whole did not keep up with population growth from 1994 to 2004, the country’s smallest (attendance 1–49) and largest churches (2,000-plus) did.”
- Olson also noted “that while church attendance is projected to increase from 50 million in 1990 to 60 million in 2050, because the U.S. Census estimates that America will grow from 248 million in 1990 to 520 million in 2050 [doubtful—because our species may be extinct by then!], the Church can’t keep up with population growth if it stays on its current course.” That is, “the Church” is unlikely to grow as rapidly as the population, so that those who attend a church on a regular basis will become an increasingly smaller percent of the total population.
- A [web site](#) announced in 2012 that “Back in July, some readers might have been surprised when [TheBlaze reported](#) that one in five Americans now consider themselves atheists, agnostics or “nones.” While some may have dismissed the figure then or questioned its accuracy, [a new analysis](#) from the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life confirms a growth in secular world-views—and a decline in religious adherence—among U.S. adults.

(Given that Olson’s study (referred to above) had concluded that *actual* church attendance is only about 40% of pollster’s conclusions, the Pew study referred to here may have *underreported*, to some degree at least, the *actual* number of individuals in this country who apply the label “agnostic” or “atheist” to themselves.)

This latter fact (regarding “nones,” etc.) may startle many in our society, but the experience of Nashville, Tennessee—in the “Bible belt”—represents an exception perhaps:

The city of Nashville, Tennessee, has one of the 16 “congregations” of the [new atheist church](#), Sunday Assembly, founded by British comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans. “Organizers say they’re tapping into the “nones,” what religion demographers call the one-fifth of Americans who claim no religious affiliation. That group is on the rise, Pew Research Center data show, and includes atheists and agnostics but, in larger numbers, also people who simply don’t identify themselves with any particular philosophy.”

A local pastor interviewed about this gave a surprising response:

“I don’t think anyone can argue against the fact that Nashville is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan, and people are coming in with different worldviews and with secular points of view,” said the Rev. Scott Sauls, pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church.

Nevertheless, for many this growth of “nones” is a disturbing trend. I’m sure that some scholars have tried to *account* for this trend (related to it is [this study](#), for example, of the growth of megachurches), but the explanation that *I* would offer is twofold:

- The Christian churches have “lost their way.”
- They have failed to adapt to knowledge developments—including knowledge developments regarding Jesus and early Christianity—that have occurred over the years.

In the pages that follow I will focus primarily on the first factor, and a useful starting point here is to recognize that scholars, over the years, have “discovered” any number of Jesuses, e.g., the [Zealot](#) Jesus “[re-discovered](#)” recently by Reza Aslan. For the modern person interested in Jesus as a specifically *religious* figure, however, it would be natural to want to emulate Jesus’s disciples (assuming that he had any: The fact that the canonical gospels refer to him having disciples does not constitute definitive proof that he did).

It can be assumed that if Jesus had any disciples, they would have looked to him as a teacher—and the fact that the earliest followers of Jesus evidently referred to themselves as “followers of the Way” (see, e.g., Acts 9:2, 11:26, 22:4, 22:14) seems to confirm this (given my assumption that “Way” alludes to “way of living”). In addition, the *only reason that a modern with a*

religious interest in Jesus would have is in Jesus as a teacher. The modern who wishes to think of Jesus as a teacher is, however, presented with at least two problems:

- Insofar as Jesus was a teacher, he directed his teachings at his *contemporaries* in a small part of the world. It is ludicrous to assume that he had *us moderns* in mind. Thus, to regard Jesus as a teacher would involve not only looking to his “actual” teachings, but making guesses as to what he *might* teach were he living today—as Charles Sheldon did in his [highly popular](#) 1896 [In His Steps](#).
- My reference above to his “actual” teachings is problematic because the four canonical gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—all present *different* “pictures” of Jesus, as do the various *non*-canonical gospels, such as the “[gnostic](#)” [gospels](#). No definitive evidence exists as to what, specifically, Jesus taught; thus, it cannot be known for certain *what* he taught!

Given the lack of definitive evidence as to what Jesus taught, those moderns who desire to be Jesus’s disciples would need to come to some agreement as to how to solve this problem, and different groups would likely solve this problem differently. One way to do so would be to take the four canonical gospels, and treat them as *sources of ideas* rather than as *historical accounts*. Even that solution would be only a *partial* solution, however, for the next step—for any given group—would be to decide which passages to *accept*, which *not* to accept. In addition, there would be a need to make Jesus relevant for today, so that decisions would need to be made in arriving at “teachings” that seemed, to members of a given group, to be (a) consistent with teachings in gospel passages, which were also (b) relevant for today’s world.

Having made the above sorts of decisions, and given the assumption that we are dealing with different *groups* here, the fact that groups exist suggests that the members of a given group would like to *meet* with other members of the group on a regular basis. Members of a given group would next, then, need to decide on the *nature* of their meetings. Should they, for example, follow the pattern of the “mainline” churches in the United States—so that meetings consist of an organ prelude, a period of welcoming by the pastor, a “passing of the peace” period (during which people greet those sitting around them), readings (from the “Old” and “New” Testaments), the singing of hymns, special music, prayers by the pastor, a period of silent prayer, a sermon by the pastor (based on the Bible passages that had been read), an “offering,” and a postlude—not necessarily in the above order, of course.

Members of a group desiring to be disciples would undoubtedly reject such meetings, given their patent lack of value for discipleship! In fact, members of a given group are likely to note that such meetings are *diversionary* rather than *helpful*, so that if *that’s* what’s to occur during meetings, one would be better off staying home—or perhaps going to a tavern!! (The latter suggestion reflecting the fact that I am a Wisconsinite!)

In fact, I would suggest that the *irrelevance* of church meetings as they exist today, [1]especially in the mainline Christian churches, is *one* of the reasons for people declaring themselves “nones”! I have no idea *how many* (in terms of percent) in our population are in that category, but would not be surprised to learn—on the basis, e.g., of the Sheldon book referred to earlier—that the number in this category is rather substantial.

If the sort of meeting associated with the mainline churches would be rejected by those desiring discipleship, might they settle on the sort of meeting associated with members of the Society of Friends (i.e., Quakers)? Quakers have no ministers, value revelation rather than Scripture, and have simple meetings: They sit in a circle, waiting for someone to be “led” to speak—delivering “God’s word” for today, for that particular group. Some Quakers might add that their meetings have a Biblical basis—specifically in John’s gospel, where we find these verses in [Chapter 15](#):

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” [2]

(I should add here that while attending a Quaker meeting several years ago, I used the term “service,” and was corrected: “‘Service’ is what we do *after* our meetings!” Good point!)

I would suggest a third option, however, a procedure that is Quaker-like in valuing “revelation,” but involves *discussion* rather than sitting in silence—the New Word Fellowship (NeWF), which I discuss in (pp. 37 - 78) my [Addressing Our Uncertain Future](#). As I give thorough attention to the NeWF in that eBook, I will not repeat myself here.

Not being a “salesman” or entrepreneur, I have made no concerted effort to publicize this alternative, or to initiate any NeWFs. I *do* believe, however, that if this option became more widely known, it would attract many—and they would cease being “nones”!

Endnotes

1. The typical Christian meeting mocks Jesus as surely as the Roman soldiers [are said to have mocked Jesus](#) as he hung on a cross.
2. Here is a relevant statement by Mark H. Gaffney in his [Gnostic Secrets of the Naassenes: The Initiatory Teachings of the Last Supper](#), 2004, p. 210): “In the ancient world the mythological symbol of the waters had a universal currency. Jesus clearly built upon this foundation and used it to introduce the teaching of God’s immanence [as opposed to transcendence], unprecedented in Judaism, involving the direct experience of our own divinity and a comprehensive awareness of sacred anatomy. The association of a new idea with a known quantity is a familiar device. Yet within three centuries of the crucifixion the mystical teachings of Jesus had been all but extinguished in the West.”

Interestingly, Gaffney also (p. 200) speculates that John the Baptizer may have foreseen “the coming storm that in just a few years would overwhelm the nation.” If John *did* so foresee the near future, those who today foresee a “storm” resulting from global warming can be regarded as today’s equivalents of John the Baptizer!

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

James Stephen, Where Are You?!

Alton C. Thompson

The *lack* of energy independence is touted as a [major problem](#) by “those who want to leave America unaffected by global energy [supply disruptions](#), and to restrict a reliance upon politically unstable states for its energy purposes.” The ostensible motive behind efforts to attain energy independence is that [this would](#) “prevent major supply disruptions like the [1973 oil crisis](#) and the [1979 energy crisis](#) from recurring.” In response to that concern, a [law was passed](#) in 2007 “to move the United States toward greater [energy independence](#) and [security](#), to increase the production of clean renewable fuels, to protect consumers, to increase the [efficiency](#) of products, buildings, and vehicles, to promote research on and deploy greenhouse gas capture and storage options, and to improve the energy performance of the Federal Government, and for other purposes.”

The *actual* performance of our government, however, led by [Pres. O'Bomber](#), suggests that the reduction of carbon emissions is a low-priority item. What's ironic here about this is that our *black* president (actually, his [heritage is mixed](#)) is continuing a trend of *energy dependence* that goes back (in terms of *modern* history) to the 1700s—when the “energy dependence” *then* existing was on *black* slave labor!

The energy dependence associated with *slave* labor is, of course, of a different order than that associated with our current use of *fossil fuels*, but *both* are objectionable on *moral* grounds. Slavery is a *direct* evil, and therefore “obviously” morally repugnant—although it has taken *time* for its evil nature to become obvious to most. Fossil fuel usage, in contrast, is an *indirect* evil: Its *direct* result is global warming, which is already causing the extinction of many species, and threatens our own—making it an evil. Although *slavery* affected (as slaves) millions of people, involving ill-treatment, often to the point of death; *global warming* is, and will be, affecting *everyone* (as the recent [IPCC report](#) notes), perhaps to the point of *wiping out our species*. For that reason alone the production/use of fossil fuels is an evil virtually beyond compare.

The history of slavery's demise (in the modern world) is one of a long, difficult struggle, initiated in Great Britain, and the reason for my title is that an element in that history may have relevance for our current struggle against fossil fuel usage.

Although the movement in Great Britain against slavery had begun with certain Quakers (of course!), [William Wilberforce](#) [1759 – 1837] emerged as one of the leading figures there in the fight against slavery. While a youth he was sent to live with an uncle and aunt (because of his mother's inability to care for him), was exposed to their Methodism, and became interested in evangelical Christianity. This alarmed his mother and grandfather, so he was brought back

home, and gradually began to lose that religious interest. However, while on a later journey with a friend, the two of them read “*The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* by [Philip Doddridge](#), a leading early 18th-century English [nonconformist](#),” and he later “underwent an evangelical [conversion](#), regretting his past life and resolving to commit his future life and work to the service of God.”

In 1783 “Wilberforce, while dining with his old [Cambridge](#) friend Gerard Edwards, met [Rev. James Ramsay](#), a [ship's surgeon](#) who had become a clergyman on the island of St Christopher (later [St Kitts](#)) in the [Leeward Islands](#), and a medical supervisor of the [plantations](#) there. What Ramsay had witnessed of the conditions endured by the slaves, both at sea and on the plantations, horrified him”—and Edwards conveyed that fact to Wilberforce during their conversation.

Ramsay later “spent three years writing *An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves in the British sugar colonies*, which was highly critical of slavery in the West Indies. The book, published in 1784, was to have an important impact in raising public awareness and interest, and it [of course] excited the ire of West Indian planters who in the coming years attacked both Ramsay and his ideas in a series of pro-slavery tracts.” Independently of that book, apparently, Wilberforce later became interested in the slavery problem, and made contact with several other anti-slavery people in England.

Wilberforce had become a member of Parliament in 1780, but it was not until 1789 that “he made his first major speech on the subject of abolition in the House of Commons, in which he reasoned that the trade was morally reprehensible and an issue of natural justice.” Note that in this speech he did not argue against slavery *per se* but, rather, against the *slave trade*. Year after year he argued, in vain, against the slave trade—and here is where James Stephen enters the picture:

A radical change of tactics, which involved the introduction of a bill to ban British subjects from aiding or participating in the slave trade to the [French colonies](#), was suggested by maritime lawyer [James Stephen](#). It was a shrewd move since the majority of British ships were now flying American flags and supplying slaves to foreign colonies with whom Britain was at war. A bill was introduced and approved by the cabinet, and Wilberforce and other abolitionists maintained a self-imposed silence, so as not to draw any attention to the effect of the bill. The approach proved successful, and the new Foreign Slave Trade Bill was quickly passed, and received the Royal Assent on 23 May 1806.

Here is [another commentary](#) on this:

It was [James] Stephen's fertile mind which came up with two ideas that helped break the deadlock over ending the slave trade. The first of these was during the struggle with Napoleon. He suggested extending anti-slavery language to a bill which was certain of support because it was viewed as a war measure, designed to stop neutral ships from delivering cargoes to France.

(This bill so infuriated the United States that it led to the War of 1812.) His second proposal was a bill to require registration of all slaves in British possessions. This never passed, but it brought to light so many abuses that it swung public opinion against slavery.

(I should add here that [Stephen married Wilberforce's sister](#), Sarah, in 1800 (his second marriage. This helps account for the connection that developed between these two men.)

It took *subterfuge* to end the slave trade (in [1807](#)—the [Slavery Abolition Act](#) being passed in 1833 [1]—and what I am suggesting here is that it might take subterfuge to end our dependence on fossil fuels! *Peaceful* subterfuge, of course, but subterfuge nonetheless.

I'm suggesting, that is, that we need a new James Stephen to arise in our midst!! May that happen! If it *doesn't*, it's likely that our species will go the way of the dinosaurs—but for very different reasons.

If, however, it *does* happen, it's conceivable that a New Order will emerge in which "[man's inhumanity to man](#)" (e.g., the current [Israeli mistreatment of Palestinians](#)) will be a thing of the past.

Endnote

1. From the fact that *formal* slavery has been abolished, it does not follow that *servitude* exists no more. [William J. Grayson](#) had a point in arguing, in his 1855 "[The Hireling and the Slave](#)," that being a "hireling"—what we today would call an "employee"—is little better than being a slave. The fact that [about half of the United States population](#) is living in poverty, or near poverty, in this quasi-capitalistic society lends support to Grayson's thesis. And the fact that the [85 richest people](#) in the world have as much wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest indicates clearly that something is dreadfully wrong with our world.

Global warming will change this situation drastically, however, as it culls most of the world's population within a matter of decades, or even years—for it is the very rich who, ultimately, are in the most vulnerable situation. "[The first shall be last.](#)"

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

Responding to Global Warming: Analyzing Some Ideas

Alton C. Thompson

Economist William D. Nordhaus, in [*The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World*](#), 2013, argues (e.g., on p. 169) that there are four possible approaches to coping with the global warming problem:

1. Reduce the rate of economic growth by reducing living standards.
2. Change our lifestyle by cutting back on those activities that involve the use of fossil fuels (e.g., reducing one's travel by airplane).
3. Continue producing and transporting (goods and people) at the same level, but do so with low- or no-carbon technologies.
4. Continue burning fossil fuels, but remove the CO₂ after combustion—i.e., engage in geo-engineering measures.

Should these proposals be given serious attention? If so, by whom? In answering these questions, the starting point is to ask: What facts of relevance regarding global warming do we need to recognize *before* we start making proposals? I would suggest the following as key facts (or projections that are reasonable to regard as “factual”):

1. The consensus with climate scientists is that if the global mean increased by [2° C.](#) (the baseline here being the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, i.e., around 1750 CE), the *negative* feedback mechanism that have been “working” to “hold back” change will, in a sense, “give up,” to be replaced with *positive* feedback mechanisms—whose function will be to *accelerate* change. Some climate scientists—[James Hansen](#) perhaps being the most notable among this group—believe that even a 2° C. “target” of increase, in the global mean temperature, is too high.
2. The “[climate commitment](#)” value is believed to be somewhere between 1° C. and 1.5° C. That is, if the emission of “[greenhouse gases](#)” were to cease, on a world-wide basis, *today*, those gases would not suddenly disappear. Their presence would *continue* in the atmosphere, and therefore continue to have an *effect* on the global mean temperature. True, the *magnitude* of that presence would decline over time, but while present those gases would cause the global mean to increase by at least a degree (to 1.8° C.), and as much as 1.5° C. (to 2.3° C.).

3. Given that we humans *will* continue to pour greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (this is an indisputable fact, is it not?!), it is *virtually certain* that an acceleration in an increase in the global mean temperature will occur at some point in the future—the only question being *when* (a few decades? a few years?).
4. Conceivably, geo-engineering measures could be introduced, and would prevent this from occurring. But there is no reason to believe that such measures would be introduced *before* we reach a “point of no return;” and even if such measures *were* introduced soon, there is the possibility that they would exacerbate the situation. It’s no wonder that Al Gore asserted recently that the introduction of such measures would be “[insane](#).”
5. Because the technology exists for a [conversion to sources of energy](#) other than fossil fuels, it’s conceivable that a “switchover” to such sources of energy would occur before an acceleration of temperature increase occurs. However, because such a switchover would require the involvement of government, and government (at the national level in particular) is controlled by Wall Street, major corporations, and the rich, the probability of this occurring in time is zero.

In light of the above five comments, it is reasonable to conclude that:

1. [Societal collapse](#) is likely here and elsewhere within a matter of decades, perhaps even years.
2. This will result in starvation, disease, an increase in violence (including suicides)—to the point that most of the world’s population will be wiped out, with the possibility, even, that our species will become extinct. (Every day [dozens of extinctions are occurring](#) with other species.)

None of the four approaches discussed by Nordhaus recognizes these two very likely possibilities. What I am forced to conclude, then, is that *all* of those approaches can be rejected. (With recommendations coming from an economist, should one be surprised?!)

One of his suggestions, if rephrased, would seem to have some promise, however. If his reference to changing our “lifestyle” were changed to changing our *way of life*, following that suggestion might give at least some of those who follow it some hope of surviving—with those *not* following it likely being doomed to premature death, however.

As I see it, changing our *way of life*—which would involve more drastic change than a mere change in *lifestyle*—can be thought of as involving three options:

1. Becoming a [homesteader](#).

2. With other individuals/families forming a “[homestead colony](#)” (a term originated by [Ralph Borsodi](#)).
3. Moving to an existing “[intentional](#)” [community](#), or forming one with other individuals and/or families.

Whichever option is chosen, two goals, at minimum, would need to be sought: (1) Becoming as self-sufficient, economically, as possible and (2) anticipating the effects of global warming (for the production of food, for access to water, for surviving severe storms, etc.).

Note that I made no reference to government here, for the simple reason that it would be foolish beyond belief to look to government for any sort of leadership with any of those options. It’s true that a [communities program was instituted](#) during the Great Depression, but (1) that program did not involve many people, and (2) the probability of government undertaking anything like it *today* is zero.

As one with five grandchildren, I wish that I could be more optimistic about the human future, but frankly can see no reason to be.

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Will We Go Over the Cliff?

Alton C. Thompson

A most succinct description—in the form of a parable—of our current situation is contained in a passage—suitably modified—in Everett Knight's 1960 *The Objective Society*, (p. 32). The passage itself pertains solely to intellectuals:

How are they to justify their position in our society[,] which is that of a man seated on the rear of a lorry examining the road behind while an incompetent driver moves on at a reckless speed in what is perhaps the wrong direction?

However, a restatement of this passage relevant for 2014 might read:



Most of us are riding down a steep, curvy road, in a bus (see left: [source](#)) driven by our business and political leaders—who, unfortunately, are so intoxicated that they are driving recklessly. We passengers, however, are so occupied with conversation and other immediate concerns that we are unaware of this fact. The bus, in making a sharp turn, hurtles off the road into a deep canyon, and all of us—both passengers and drivers—are killed.

What I am referring to here, of course, is the ominous [threat posed by global warming](#)—a threat recognized by most climate scientists (e.g., the recent [IPCC report](#)) and a few others, but not by the mass of people, nor by our purported “leaders.” Climate scientists do not know how soon we will reach the cliff, but know that unless actions are taken soon, the cliff will be reached at some point in the future (certainly before the end of this century), the result being a massive culling of the human population—perhaps to the point of the extinction of our species.

The tragedy here is that we cannot look to governmental or corporate officials for leadership, nor can we look to the mass media, the entertainment industry, etc. There is, however, a group of professionals in our society who have contact with millions of people, and who have some influence over them, professionals who *could*, conceivably, play an important role in educating their publics, and in encouraging them to (a) think deeply about how to respond to this problem, and to (b) discuss their ideas with others.

The group that I am referring to is the *clergy*.

Granted that few members of the clergy are well-versed regarding global warming. However, most of them are reasonably literate and intelligent, and there is enough *non*-technical literature available out there for them to gain a basic knowledge of the subject. Surely at least some of them have been exposed to some of the literature on the subject, and out a concern for their children and grandchildren, they might be expected to give global warming more than a second thought.

There is a pressing need for members of our species to be “saved” from premature death resulting from—directly and indirectly—global warming. And, fortunately, “salvation” is a concept familiar to many members of the clergy. True, most clergy for whom the concept is meaningful interpret the concept in an *other*-worldly sense. Those members of the clergy for whom “salvation” is unimportant in that sense should be able to recognize that it is now important to add that term to their vocabulary, but give it a *this*-worldly meaning. And even members of the clergy for whom the term has an *other*-worldly meaning should be able to recognize a need, at present, to give it a *this*-worldly meaning as well. After all, any reading of the canonical gospels makes clear that the main character in those gospels—Jesus—had a this-worldly orientation primarily.

A few examples of this:

- The [Good Samaritan parable](#) has a non-Jew giving aid to a Jew—the injured man in question having already been passed by a priest and Levite. Thus, the parable simultaneously criticizes the Judaism of his time (as having gotten “off the track”) and enjoins the helping of those in need—by virtue of the fact that they are in need, with no qualifications being involved.
- His assertion (quoting from [Leviticus 19:18](#)) that one should [love the neighbor](#)—again without any qualifications.
- His discussion of the [sheep and goats](#), in which he enjoins his hearers to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, be hospitable to strangers, give clothing to those needing it, looking after those who are sick, and visiting those in prison. What’s notable about this story is it’s cleverness: It’s told in such a way that these six points are repeated four times!
- His declaration that the [teachers of the law and Pharisees were hypocrites](#) for tithing, but neglecting “the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness”—a passage that echoes [Jeremiah 22:3](#).

Whether any of this has a sound *historical* basis is beside the point here. What's important about it, rather, is that most clergy tend to treat these passages as “gospel” (!), and even those who doubt the historical veracity of the passages tend to regard the passages as giving good advice.

Assuming that these passages (and others like them) *do* have historical value, it is easy to believe that if Jesus were alive today, his concern for the well-being of others would manifest itself in a concern for global warming—given its threat to the very continued existence, as a species, of “God’s creatures.” Given this, and assuming that he would regard Christian clergy as worthy spokespersons for him (!), it is also easy to believe that he would urge clergy to educate their congregants about this threat, and encourage them to think about and discuss with others—whether fellow congregants or not—possible responses to this problem.

Is it *realistic* to assume that members of the clergy could become an important force in our society in addressing the problem of global warming? Probably not! After all, most of the churches and denominations in this society are a part of the societal system, and as such are supporters of the Existing Order. Few clergy and church members are likely aware of that fact—and it is *that fact which makes them so useful as supporters of the Existing Order*.

Clergy and the churches serve the interests of the Existing Order in different ways—with churches serving those with lower incomes and educations in one way (e.g., providing emotional release, thereby helping congregants maintain their sanity), and those serving those with higher incomes and more education in another way (e.g., convincing them that they *deserve* their positions, and thereby implying that others are *less* deserving).

“Thinking outside the box” is ostensibly prized in this society, but thinking that threatens the continued functioning of the Existing Order puts one in jeopardy. Given that clergy who might consider following the advice provided above are likely to at least *sense*, if not actually *realize*, this fact, I have serious doubts that clergy will play any significant role in “saving” us from the disasters that lie in our future as humans. Ironical, isn’t it!

It appears that “salvation” is merely a “[utopian](#)” idea!

(Sorry, Dahr Jamail, for using a title rather similar to your http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175785/tomgram%3A_dahr_jamail_the_climate_change_sco_recard/. If you find out, I hope that you will forgive me!)

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

“Fighting Against Climate Change”: Rational or Delusional?

Alton C. Thompson

Bishop Desmond Tutu, in a recent [Guardian essay](#), asserted that “There are many ways that all of us can fight against climate change: by not wasting energy, for instance.” Bishop Tutu then went on to “recognize” that “these individual measures will not make a big enough difference in the available time.” The solution to the problem of “climate change,” Bishop Tutu, continued, is for people to

break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change. We can, for instance, boycott events, sports teams and media programming sponsored by fossil-fuel energy companies. We can demand that the advertisements of energy companies carry health warnings. We can encourage more of our universities and municipalities and cultural institutions to cut their ties to the fossil-fuel industry. We can organise [car-free days](#) and build broader societal awareness. We can ask our religious communities to speak out.

In other words, what worked against the evil of apartheid in South Africa can also work in fighting “against climate change.”

The basis for Tutu’s argument is the fact that:

This week [i.e., the week beginning April 5, 2014] in Berlin, scientists and public representatives [have been weighing up radical options for curbing emissions](#) contained in the third report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC]. The bottom line is that we have 15 years to take the necessary steps. The horse may not have bolted, but it's well on its way through the stable door.

But *do* we have the 15 years referred to by Tutu? If it *were* clear that we had 15 years to “turn things around,” Tutu’s proposal might make sense. But even that is doubtful, for the day before publishing Tutu’s essay, *The Guardian* published an article by [Nafeez Ahmad](#) which pointed out that many [ecologists](#) regard many of the IPCC’s recommended solutions as “deeply flawed.” Tutu had based his suggestion of boycotts, etc., on information that he had regarding the IPCC report, and apparently assumed that those recommendations would be widely accepted—including by ecologists. In giving so much credence to IPCC recommendations, Tutu has ended up with “[egg on his face](#)”—perhaps without knowing it, however!

Perhaps the good bishop should stick with religion! He is not helping matters by making suggestions that may serve to delay those sorts of actions that *would* have significance.

Much the same goes for Anna Lappé, who recently declared: “[Don’t Panic, Go Organic](#),” the subtitle of her article being “The IPCC Report Should be a Wakeup Call for Climate-Smart Food.” Her specialty, by the way, is not religion but, rather, food! (In 2010 she published a book-length discussion of this matter, [Diet for a Hot Planet: The Climate Crisis at the End of Your Fork and What You Can Do about It](#). The fact that [Bill McKibben](#) wrote the Introduction for this book suggests either that he is getting desperate for things to write about or believes that Lappé has the answer to the problem of global warming!)

The problem that I have with both Tutu’s and Lappé’s articles is the explicit assumption in Tutu’s article that we have 15 years to do something significant, and the implicit assumption in Lappé’s article that we have at least that much time. It’s obvious that neither of these two fine people have read [Guy McPherson’s](#) “[Climate—Change Summary and Update](#),” updated just a few days ago. McPherson is not a climate scientist—rather, he is a Professor Emeritus of Natural Resources and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology—and in my mind that makes him highly qualified to write about the *implications* of global warming. His professional background, I would argue, gives him good reason to be highly pessimistic regarding the human future (a fact that comes through clearly in his recently-published [Going Dark](#), 2013).

What gives me, specifically, pessimism is that:

- The global mean temperature has increased about 0.85° C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.
- The consensus with climate scientists is that if and when the global mean increases by 2° C., “runaway” change will likely begin. That change will involve not only an accelerating increase in the global mean, but (a) more storms, (b) more monstrous, severe storms, and (c) increased variability in weather conditions—a fact that may be especially critical for successful food production. I should add that some climate scientists—James Hansen being a notable example—believe that runaway will quite possibly begin even *before* the increase in global mean temperature is 2° C.
- The “[climate commitment](#)” value is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C. What *that* means is that if humans would cease pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere *tomorrow*, global warming would still continue—to a point somewhere within the range given above.

These facts and projections lead me to the inexorable conclusion that [runaway](#) is inevitable at some point in the near future—that is, that an *acceleration* in change is likely to occur in the near future, given the fact that global warming is a process that “feeds upon itself” (as one would expect, given that the earth is a *system*—the reason [James Lovelock](#) has given earth the name

“[Gaia](#)”). What is obvious to scientists such as McPherson is that it is now too late to halt further global warming--so that, in turn, it is simply *foolish* to talk about “fighting” global warming.

What I see as likely is that:

1. Runaway change will begin within a few decades, with most of the world’s population being wiped out by the various “dimensions” of global warming (e.g., heat, flooding, drought, and their implications for starvation, disease, and violence—including suicides).
2. Those individuals who have had a way of life that either *is* now basically self-sufficient or could be easily changed to *become* virtually self-sufficient have a chance to survive—especially if they are aware of what global warming is likely to entail, and plan changes in their way of life accordingly. What I have in mind here is people who live in eco-communities now, the Amish, etc.
3. Individuals who now are a part of the Existing Order, but recognize that it is [headed for a cliff](#), want to jump off the bus before it reaches the cliff, and therefore either begin to homestead, join an existing eco-community, or form one with like-minded others will have a chance to survive.

It’s possible, of course, that global warming will render our species extinct within a matter of decades. But given that we cannot know this for sure now, if one is not in category 2 above, one should strive to become a member of category 3. Otherwise, one is putting one’s life—and the lives of one’s friends and family—in one’s hands, and one may very well perish.

[This essay was sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> web site for posting.]

What is a Gentleman?

Alton C. Thompson

Troy [a “gay,” played by Dave Foley]: You know, I asked him [Adam, played by Brendan Fraser] about that. He said, good manners are just a way of showing other people we have respect for them. See, I didn't know that, I thought it was just a way of acting all superior. Oh and you know what else he told me?

Eve [played by Alicia Silverstone]: What?

Troy: He thinks I'm a gentleman and you're a lady.

Eve: [disgusted] Well, consider the source! I don't even know what a lady is.

Troy: I know, I mean I thought a “gentleman” was somebody that owned horses. But it turns out, his short and simple definition of a lady or a gentleman is, someone who always tries to make sure the people around him or her are as comfortable as possible.

The above is an exchange that occurs among two of the characters in the movie [*Blast From the Past*](#) (1999). The part of the exchange that I would like to comment on here is the statement that a gentleman is “someone who always tries to make sure the people around him or her are as comfortable as possible.”

The individual quoted here—Adam—may have been too unsophisticated to have realized the full implications of that definition, but even if that was *not* the case, his statement was a “[mouthful](#)”—a statement pregnant with meaning. And the earlier quotation, to the effect that “good manners are just a way of showing other people we have respect for them,” is consistent with this statement, but to a lesser degree.

Those who practice good manners relative to others *may* do so out of respect for others, but not necessarily. For many, showing good manners toward others is merely a *habit*—and *may* very well be a means of keeping one's distance from others. In short, if someone demonstrates good manners with reference to others, it is difficult to infer from *that* fact the *motivation*—or, better, the *reason*, given that *consciousness* may not be involved—that lies behind the behavior.

If, however, one makes a *genuine* (for superficiality *is* possible here!) effort to make those around oneself feel *comfortable*, the implication is that one is able to “read” others (e.g., their facial expressions and mannerisms), *infer* from what one has read what they need, so that one can then *behave* relative to others in a fashion that will make them feel comfortable. Doing so demonstrates, by the way, that one not only has [empathy](#) for those around one, but regards them

as one's *equal*—neither inferior nor superior to oneself. The other may himself or herself *feel* inferior to oneself, but by *treating* that other as an equal, one helps that other person change his or her self-image.

It's possible, of course, that the other *does* feel superior to oneself, and therefore believes that s/he *deserves* deference. By treating such a person as one's equal one makes some slight (or more!) contribution to "[bringing him down a notch](#)." That is, if one *refuses* to treat one's "superiors" with deference, this may help them gain the understanding that we *are* all equal in being *different*, but different in *kind* rather than *degree*—so that any claim that one is *superior* to another is purely arbitrary, without a basis in reality.

If, in one's upbringing, one were taught—*everyone* were taught—that in interacting with others one should make a sincere effort to make those others feel comfortable, our world would—obviously!—be very different from the one that we are currently forced to live in! In saying "different" what I mean, of course, is that it would be a far more *pleasant* place to live in—for an implication of such a situation is that if one gained more "success" than others, one's empathy for others would result in ensuring that the needs of others were met, to the best of one's ability. That one's actions, however, would be carefully conceived and executed, to ensure that the recipients of one's help would be able to maintain their self-respect.

In such a world there might be variations in wealth, but there would not be the extreme variation that exists today—the [worst inequality in the "developed" world](#) today being in the United States! And the inequality that *did* exist would have no significance, given that those who *had* wealth would ensure that those *lacking* wealth would have their physical and psychological needs met.

With everyone having their needs met it should be possible to address, in a meaningful way, the major problem that we humans face today—our interference in earth's [natural cycles](#) (e.g., the carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous, sulfur, etc., cycles). Since the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago we humans have acted as if there *were* no Earth System, and especially since the Industrial Revolution (i.e., beginning around 1750 CE) we have been stressing Earth System through our activities—including our "production" of more and more humans!—that have been inputting excesses into the System (such as carbon and nitrogen).

The "excess" that has been given most attention in recent years is that of carbon in the form of CO₂ (i.e., carbon dioxide), with the excess carbon that we have been pouring into the atmosphere via our burning of fossil fuels, resulting in global warming—with the danger that this will accelerate within a few years, resulting in a severe culling of the human population, perhaps to the point of extinction. It is important to recognize, though, that our other "excesses" also have harmful consequences associated with them, perhaps as harmful (or more!) than that associated with carbon.

What makes it unlikely, however, that we humans will rectify this excess situation—in spite of the fact that ecological scientists understand, reasonably well, the nature of our problem—is that few in this society have been brought up to be gentlemen and ladies in the sense as described above. Instead, so many in our midst have acquired—either through being taught or via their life experiences—one sort of ideology or another—economic, political, religious, etc. As a consequence, their view of the world is distorted by the lens—i.e., the ideology—through which they view the world.

In effect, although the fact of the matter is that they are an integral *part of* Earth System—in that it affects them, and they affect it—they act as if they were *apart from* it. Granted that their effects on Earth System have not become obvious until relatively recently—via the diligent efforts of an army of dedicated scientists. But although scientists—and especially recently—have made an effort to *popularize* their findings, when one listens to what our leaders—governmental, corporate, etc.—have to say, one realizes that either these leaders are not *informing* themselves regarding these scientific findings, or are too occupied with immediate matters to give the future any serious thought.

This does not bode well for our future as humans! Given that we cannot look to our “leaders” for leadership (!), our only hope lies in individual/small group efforts—not to try to halt further warming (for that is not possible) but, rather, to engage in those pre-adaptive activities that might allow them to survive once “[runaway](#)” begins.

If there *are* survivors of this “holocaust”—a term appropriate here, given that global warming is likely to cull most (if not all!) of the world’s population—let us hope that they raise their children to be free of any ideology, and be ladies and gentlemen in the sense described above (rather than owning horses!).

[sent to “Nature Bats Last” site (<http://guymcpherson.com/> on April 14, 2014, and was informed shortly after that it will appear on his site in a few days (but it hasn’t!); sent to DV site on 15th.]

“It’s Later Than You Think” [\(ACT II\)](#)

Alton C. Thompson

We are living in a unique—and uniquely perilous—time in human history, a time when the demise of our species is a very real possibility—that demise being a result of our own actions. Brilliant intellectual [Noam Chomsky](#) noted recently, [quoting](#) Strategic Air Command Gen. Lee Butler, “humanity has so far survived the nuclear age ‘by some combination of skill, luck and divine intervention, and I suspect the latter in greatest proportion.’” From the fact that we have escaped—so far at least!—thermo-nuclear annihilation, it does not, however, follow that we will



be able to escape the consequences of our interference with Earth System (which consists of a *collection* of systems, actually), our extinction as a species being a possible consequence. (Numerous [extinctions are occurring](#) at present, and the “present rate of extinction may be up to 140,000 species per year”—our interference with Earth System being the primary cause of those extinctions.) (source of “cartoon” to the left: <http://guymcpherson.com/2014/04/to-go-extinct-or-not-go-extinct-that-is-the-question/>)

A question that occurred to me recently was: If the world were inhabited now solely by [gatherer-hunters](#) (I say that rather than “hunter-gatherers” in deference to [Richard E. Leakey](#))—as it *once* was—but the *current*

situation existed, would those peoples have a better chance of surviving than we do? The answer to that question came quickly (for I knew the answer before I even asked the question!): Of *course* they would, for two reasons in particular:

1. They “lived off the land” in the sense of the immediate surround (unlike us!), and ate a [great variety of foods](#) (what was available in their area, which might vary during the course of a year)—and their foods were not adulterated with various additives!
2. In not having a sedentary life, as the food supply in the area of their current occupance became scarce, they could—and would—move to a different location, being able to do so because of their having a [concept of “property rights”](#) that differed significantly from ours.

After answering this question that I had posed (hypothetically!) to myself, I realized that it was a dumb question to ask, however, given that the current situation exists *because* most of us today—with the exception of those “primitives” that we have not yet killed!—are *not* gatherer-hunters, it being our *modern way of life* that is *directly* responsible for our current perilous situation. Had we humans *remained* gatherer-hunters, it is virtually certain that we would not be facing our current perilous situation.

That fact suggests the question: Why did we allow our current way of life to develop? Actually, that is a poor way of phrasing the question, because it tacitly assumes that we *did* choose the current modern way of life—which is a highly questionable assumption. The question would be *better* phrased simply as: Why did our current way of life develop?

Before addressing that question I should, however, make note of the fact that although I used the word “crisis” above, in talking with friends/relatives/acquaintances, listening to politicians, reading the newspaper, listening to those who report the weather (!), watching television, listening to sermons delivered by members of the clergy, etc., one gains little, if any, sense that we are facing a crisis situation. The fact that we *are*, in fact, facing a crisis, combined with the fact that so few *recognize* this fact, means that the crisis that we now face is even *more* serious than it would *need* to be—and *should* be!

The *fact* that few seem to recognize the crisis that we face at present is, of course, a problem. And—significantly—what *that* fact means for those of us who *do* recognize our current crisis situation is *not* that we should make a concerted effort to “awaken” those who are asleep: Trying to so do would be a waste of precious time. What we must do, rather, is to (a) *establish* a course of action for *ourselves*, and to then (b) *act* on that plan of action.

What that course of action might be will be given attention in due course in this essay, but first I must address the question that I posed earlier: Why did our current way of life develop?

The best sort of answer to this question would have “truth value” while also being *useful*. The importance of the latter feature—particularly, perhaps, in the answer that I provide here—is that it suggests that it will be *extremely difficult* for us humans to solve the problem facing us. Indeed, it leads to the unhappy conclusion that **the problem cannot be solved in a fully satisfactory way** (a point that I will argue later). It might seem curious to regard such an answer as “useful,” but I believe that a necessary starting point in addressing our current situation is for those of us who *are* aware of the problem to understand the serious obstacle that this fact of “serious difficulty” presents to us—for this should help us be as *realistic* as possible in *addressing* the problem.

My answer to the question of why our current way of life developed is that the *nature of our thinking* has been flawed for some time in various ways, among them:

1. It has tended to be [reductionistic](#); that is, rather than thinking in terms of *wholes*, we have tended to break things into their constituent parts (as with academic disciplines, in a sense!), under the tacit belief that by gaining an understanding of the *parts* we will gain an understanding of the *whole*.
2. Related to this, we have tended to think in *non-systemic* terms. Although we recognize cause-effect, functional, etc., relationships, we have tended not to go beyond this and recognize [systems](#) and the *interrelationships* existing within them. True, it is fairly common to recognize the *human body* as a system (a fact that, however, is contradicted by the presence of heart, kidney, etc. specialists!), but we tend not to recognize the existence of *other* human systems (e.g., [societal systems](#)), nor to recognize the fact that humans are a part of *larger* systems.
3. Related to this latter point, we have tended to perceive the non-human part of our world as the “environment”—suggesting that we tend to think of it as existing *apart* from us. Such a perception is involved, e.g., with our concept of “conservation”—which suggests not only that the non-human world is “outside” us, but exists *for* us. That is, we have tended to perceive the non-human part of our world from a *utilitarian* standpoint (although *some* of us perceive it as beautiful, mysterious, sacred, etc.).
4. Insofar as we recognize change, we tend to assume that it tends to be gradual, smooth (a tendency which may have its roots specifically in the geological ideas of [Sir Charles Lyell](#), who “popularised [James Hutton](#)’s concepts of [uniformitarianism](#)”)—and is *necessarily* of a “progressive” nature.
5. We tend to have a fixation on the present and near future; and because of our assumption regarding change, we tend to assume that the future will be much like the present—different in *details*, but *fundamentally* the same, except for some minor “improvements”—which will, eventually, however, become *major* “improvements.”
6. Some, in their education, are exposed to *hypothetical* arguments (e.g., geographers in being exposed to the ideas of [Johan Heinrich von Thünen](#)), and in the process come to believe that they are learning *empirically-based* truths—“truths” that then guide their recommendations (e.g., to political leaders) and behavior (often leading to disastrous results!).
7. Related to this, some learn that “[market](#)” is not a mere abstraction with *hypothetical* existence, but is something empirically *real*. Beyond this, they learn that this “market” is (a) a *natural* phenomenon, that (b) its “workings” produce “desirable” results, the (c) *best possible* results (shades of [Pangloss](#)!), in fact, so that (d) although humans, in having the

capability to choose *can* affect the workings of the “market,” any human efforts to affect the workings of the “market” constitute *interference*—thereby resulting in outcomes that will hurt, in some way, at least some of the individuals/firms involved. (The reference to “interference” here might suggest that those dominated by this mode of thinking tend to think in *systems* terms—but nothing could be further from the truth!)

8. The goals that some think of as of primary importance are very *narrow* in scope—e.g., “efficiency,” rather than goals that pertain more directly to human well-being.
9. Some have a fixation on *uniformity*, and therefore devalue variety—and work to eradicate it. Given that sexual reproduction functions to produce variety, thereby increasing a given species’s chances of survival, one must conclude that it is *variety*, rather than *uniformity*, which is “natural.”
10. Many are so attached to their existing way of life that they regard a drastic *change* in way of life as unthinkable. The exception to this “rule” is that a drastic change in way of life (but in this case, what I prefer to term “lifestyle”) that would involve (a) more material goods and services, (b) more variety in them, and (c) better quality, would be readily embraced by most.

Let us refer to the above features of modern thinking as constituting the Modern Mode (MD) of thinking.

A question that arises about MD thinking is: Are the various tendencies listed above (a) totally *unrelated*, (b) partially related, or is it possible that they (c) all stem from the same source? My answer here is one that has been affected strongly by Morris Berman’s [*Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline*](#) (2011), in which he argues for the central role that “economic liberalism”—with its orientation to so-called “free markets”—has played in our society, a mode of thinking that Berman traces back to the sixteenth century. With Berman, I would argue that such thinking has played a dominant role in our society—a far greater role in our society than, e.g., Christianity (which has tended merely to *adapt* itself to the society, rather than being a force for societal system change—except at [rare times](#)).

Why economic liberalism itself has grown to dominance—and given us MD thinking—is a question worth pursuing, I suppose, but doing so here would carry me too far afield from my principal objectives here. The central points that I wish to make in this essay are that:

1. Our modern way of life is, *ultimately*, the product of the MD thinking that has come to dominate our society.
2. Our MD thinking is a serious obstacle to arriving at a *solution*—insofar as one is even *possible*!—to the crisis that faces us today.

Brilliant intellectual of the previous century [Thorstein Veblen](#), in his [The Theory of Business Enterprise](#) (1904), stated (p. 318) that “Arguments which proceed on material cause and effect cannot be met with arguments from conventional precedent or dialectically sufficient reason, and conversely.” Today, we might say—relative to point 2 above—that arguments that proceed on the basis of MD thinking cannot be met with arguments that proceed on the basis of a more ecologically-oriented mode of thinking, “and conversely.”

The significance of this point is that those who think in MD terms—which describes virtually *all* of our “leaders”!—can only with difficulty—if at all!—be persuaded (a) *that* we are currently faced with a literal “life or death” situation which (b) *has* no satisfactory solution, but (c) *may* have a *partial* solution, but (d) one too *unconventional* for them to consider. Because of these facts, those who today *are* aware of our present plight need to “think outside the box” in responding to the ominous threat that we face—e.g., the sort of thinking that I offer later in this essay.

What needs to be pointed out in particular about our current situation is that—as stated (p. 194) by Diane Dumanoski in her excellent [The End of the Long Summer: Why We Must Remake Our Civilization to Survive on a Volatile Earth](#) (2010)—the “long summer” in her title alluding to Brian Fagan’s [The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization](#) (2003):

- There is “growing *instability* in planetary systems,” because we humans have been interfering in the “metabolism” (as Dumanoski puts it) of Earth System.
- There is “increasing *vulnerability* in human systems.” Individual human systems have merged into a Human System that is comparable to Earth System in its interactions and flows. Interruptions can—and do—occur in this mammoth System, however, because of shortages resulting from droughts, excess rain, flooding, and other “natural” phenomena (caused by *our* “interference,” however!), political factors, etc. And, various factors may affect the flows themselves. As a consequence of these factors, along with the low-stockage rates that have become common with many firms, modern societies have become fragile, vulnerable, so that the interruptions that occur in the future—are likely to become more prevalent and severe in the future, in fact—are likely to result in societal collapse here and elsewhere at some future point in time (as a *direct* result of violence (including suicides), starvation, disease, etc.), with a tremendous loss of human life.

(emphasis added to the above quotations)

By no means are these two trends a good combination!! For what it suggests is that **even if the bulk of our population were *not* “possessed” as indicated in the above discussion by MD thinking, we would *still* be in deep trouble**. For referring here to just *one* of the important [biochemical cycles](#) associated with Earth System, the [carbon cycle](#), it can be said that:

1. Our burning of fossil fuels (along with [deforestation](#)) has resulted in an increase of the global mean [by about 0.85° C.](#) since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (which many date to about 1850 CE).
2. The “[climate commitment](#)” value is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C. (1.6° C. say [some scientists](#)). That is, if humans throughout the world were to cease pouring [greenhouse gases](#) into the atmosphere *tomorrow* (which won’t happen, of course!), warming would continue to a point somewhere within the range just specified.
3. Perhaps even more important than warming *per se* is the likelihood that (a) the *number* of storms will increase, (b) there will be more “monster” storms—i.e., the *severity* of storms will increase, and (c) weather will become more and more variable/erratic, and therefore more unpredictable.
4. The factor that lies *behind* the points mentioned in point 3 is the fact that global warming is a phenomenon that tends to “feed upon itself.” Put another way—a highly ironic one!—global warming is a process that tends to “snowball”:
 - As warming proceeds, more and more snow and ice melt, exposing more and more bare ground. As bare ground has a lower [albedo](#) than do snow and ice (which tend to *reflect*, rather than *absorb*, the short-wave energy coming from the sun), it tends to *absorb* the sun’s rays, and convert that energy into long-wave energy, which acts to further heat the lower atmosphere. (For recent research on this in Greenland, see [this](#).)
 - As warming proceeds, the permafrost that covers vast areas in the northern hemisphere tends to thaw, in the process releasing [methane gas](#), which is far more potent as a greenhouse gas than is carbon dioxide (CO₂). Heating is thereby *accelerated*.
 - Carbon “sinks” such as the oceans are becoming saturated, so that for that reason alone more of the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere will *stay* there for a long period, and “do their thing” (i.e., contribute to *further* heating).
 - [Forests serve as a carbon “sinks,”](#) but because increased variability in weather conditions is a feature of global warming, and severe *droughts* will become increasingly common, *forest fires* will also become increasingly common—and become an [increasingly important source of atmospheric carbon](#), thereby “contributing” further to the acceleration process.

5. A general consensus exists with climate scientists that the global [mean must not be allowed to increase](#) more than about 2° C., with some such scientists (such as [James Hansen](#)) believing that even 2° C. is too high a number. In fact, Bill McKibben has given us this quote: “‘Any number much above one degree involves a gamble,’ writes [Kerry Emanuel](#) of MIT, a leading authority on hurricanes, ‘and the odds become less and less favorable as the temperature goes up.’”

Given the above five facts/projections, in conjunction with the fact that DM thinking *is* dominant in our society, I believe the following to be reasonable conclusions (given the unlikelihood that a switchover to non-polluting sources of energy will occur soon, and that geo-engineering—for a discussion of this see, e.g., Chapter 6 in the Dumanoski book quoted above—measures are unlikely to be introduced, but *if* introduced are likely to create additional problems, and so have been [labeled “insane”](#) by Al Gore):

1. Atmospheric change will begin to accelerate within a few decades—certainly before 2050 CE. Assuming, that is, that acceleration has not already begun! We really do not know whether or not it has.
2. The effects of this accelerating change are likely to be manifold—including a severe culling of the human population—[perhaps 90%](#) (!), per climate scientist [Kevin Anderson](#).

On the basis of these conclusions it seems to me that one will have the best chance of surviving if one does not look to our “leaders”—political, corporate, etc.—for “salvation” but, rather, does one of the following:

1. Become a [homesteader](#).
2. With other individuals/families form a “[homestead colony](#)” (a term originated by [Ralph Borsodi](#)).
3. Move to an existing “[intentional” community](#), or form one with other individuals and/or families. Note that this would involve an “[exodus](#)” of sorts!

Whichever option is chosen, two goals, at minimum, would need to be sought: (1) Becoming as *self-sufficient*, economically, as possible and (2) *anticipating* the effects of global warming (for the production of food, for access to water, for surviving severe storms, etc.). In addition, given that our existing society is rotten in so many respects, I advocate that those taking either option 2 or 3—but especially those taking option 3—that they recognize the reality of human “design specifications” (see pp. 38 – 117 in [this eBook](#)), and include that matter in their planning efforts.

I should note that a point made in that eBook is that a variety of views exist as to what our “design specifications” as humans are, and rather than *bemoaning* that fact one should *welcome* it, for that diversity provides a basis for *discussion*, and *joint* decision-making in coming to

conclusions as to what, specifically, to *believe*, and then *do*, about this matter. Members of a group deciding to create an eco-community for themselves would, of course, have a large number of decisions to make, and [this essay of mine](#) discusses some of the major ones.

Despite the fact that most in our society are likely to be a “hard sell” with the above proposal, so that even *trying* to “sell” it might be an utter waste of time, still there is the possibility that the eco-communities created in response to the proposal will act as “[cities upon a hill](#)”—at least in the sense that MN people, in seeing them and visiting them, will, like “[doubting Thomas](#),” come to the realization that this is a good idea after all, and *also* adopt the idea.

If this occurs, Kevin Anderson’s projection of a 90% culling of the world’s population might, conceivably, be reduced to less than 80%, but I foresee *no possibility whatsoever* of a percent much less than 80% being “saved.”

That is a sad projection to make, to be sure. But if [my strategy for societal system change](#), published in 1984 (!), had been implemented shortly after the publication of that article, there would now be no *need* for me to have written this essay! However, it *wasn’t*, so that there *is* a need for me to write this essay after all.

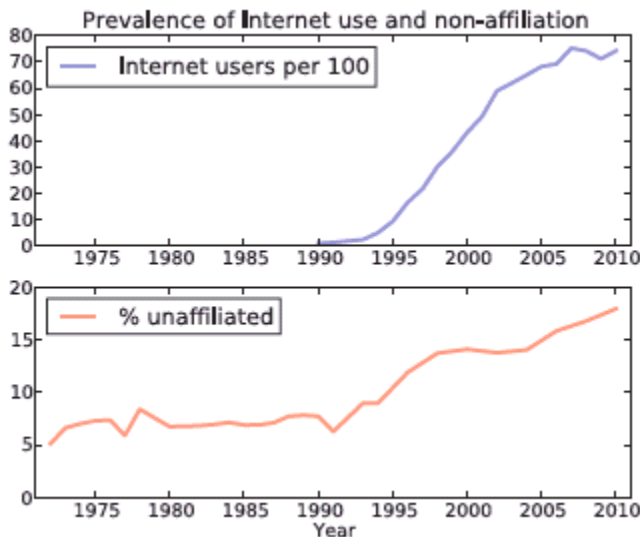
The odds seem stacked against us humans at present, but given that we cannot know, with certainty, how the world will be in, say, 2050 CE, it would be best to assume that we—*some* of us, at any rate—can “make it,” and proceed with confidence that we *will* do so.

[Sent to [Guy McPherson's](#) web site; 92 comments as of 5/1/2014, and [BNW](#) later.]

Will Religion Become Extinct Before Us?

Alton C. Thompson

A [recent study](#) showed that from about 1970 to 1990 the percent of the United States population in the “unaffiliated” category—so far as religious identification is concerned—varied somewhat, but showed no distinctive trend either upward or downward. Since 1990, however, until 2010, the trend has been definitely upward. The author of the study—Allen B. Downey, a Professor of Computer Science at Olin College of Engineering (in Massachusetts)—discovered (unsurprisingly!) a rather strong correlation between that trend and the trend in internet usage (note that each of the graphs below has a different Y scale, which can easily lead to misinterpretation of what the second graph “says” relative to the first one):



The question that this posed for Downey was: *Is there a cause and effect relationship here—in that internet users are more likely to be “unaffiliateds” than non-internet users, because internet usage promotes becoming unaffiliated?*

Certainly such a relationship is plausible, given that the internet puts a wealth of information (and *disinformation!*) at one’s fingertips, enabling one to be exposed to a great variety of views, thereby broadening one’s horizon—and *thereby* causing one to question the verities that one had been

exposed to up to the time when one began internet browsing.

But just because the relationship postulated here is a *plausible* one, it does not follow that it is an *actual* one—given the old “saw” that “correlation does not prove causation.” Downey, however, was intent on investigating the relationship intensively, to determine whether there was a reasonably good basis for concluding that internet usage tends to lead to becoming unaffiliated with religion.

To conduct his research Downey went to the [General Social Survey](#), which:

aims to gather data on contemporary American society in order to monitor and explain trends and constants in attitudes, behaviors, and attributes; to examine the structure and functioning of society in general as well as the role played by relevant subgroups; to compare the United

States to other societies in order to place American society in comparative perspective and develop cross-national models of human society; and to make high-quality data easily accessible to scholars, students, policy makers, and others, with minimal cost and waiting.

The data obtained from this survey consists of *questionnaire answers* to a series of questions, some pertaining to personal attributes (e.g., race, age, education, income, gender), others regarding one's behavior, views, etc. The problem with such data, of course, is that although a person can be expected to be truthful about some of his or her characteristics, the individual may be reluctant—for whatever reasons—to be truthful about some behaviors (e.g., sexual practices) and some views. Given the latter fact, it is somewhat surprising that so many (a *relative* judgment, to be sure!) are claiming to be unaffiliated.

However, the results of a recent study by David Olson, Director of Church Planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church, [found that](#):

the actual rate of church attendance from head counts is less than half of the 40% the pollsters report. Numbers from actual counts of people in Orthodox Christian churches (Catholic, mainline and evangelical) show that in 2004, 17.7% of the population attended a Christian church on any given weekend.

What Olson's study suggests is that the rate of non-affiliation may be *far* greater than the figures that Downey used. *That* possibility raises the question: What are the church attendance figures, from year to year, for the period 1990-2010, and how do *those* figures correlate with internet usage? Given that such figures do not appear to be available, no answer to this question is possible. However, because *actual* church attendance would seem to be a better measure of non-affiliation than the measure that Downey used—answers to the question, “What is your religious preference?”—it is difficult to give much credence to Downey's results. As the old “saw” goes, “GIGO—garbage in, garbage out.”

In the absence of time series data on church attendance for the period of 1990- 2010, it is impossible to know (a) *if* there is a trend, if so, whether (b) the trend is *steeper* than that for internet usage, (c) *less* steep, or (d) has about the *same* steepness.

In the face of our ignorance about whatever trend exists for church attendance, it is impossible to know whether Christianity will become extinct (a) *before* we humans do (around 2050 CE?), or (b) will become extinct at the *same* time—it not being possible for it to (c) become extinct *after* we humans are all “dead and gone,” of course, because we humans are “carriers” (!) of religion!

In a very real sense, however, Christianity—defined as the religion of *Jesus*—started on a path of extinction by mid first century, and was dead before the end of the fourth century, thanks to the Roman emperors [Constantine](#) and [Theodosius I](#)!

[Sent to the <http://dissidentvoice.org/> for posting, then to [BNW](#) 4/22/2014.]

Economic Inequality: Another Answer

Alton C. Thompson

Here is [one perspective](#) on what the future has in store for us:

We have already returned to the levels of income inequality of the 1920s, and the concentration of wealth is heading toward the ratios of the 1890s. The social relations of the future, writes Piketty could resemble Jane Austen's world, in which a tiny group of the wealthy employed vast armies of poorly paid servants.

The "Piketty" referred to in this quotation is [Thomas Piketty](#), a French economist whose massive [Capital in the Twenty-First Century](#) has just been translated into English and published. Our problem today, says [Jeff Faux](#), summarizing Piketty, is that

contrary to what we're taught in Economics 101, markets appear to have no self-correcting mechanism that can halt the worsening misdistribution of wealth. If allowed to go unchecked, a tiny number of capitalists will own just about everything, with social consequences that Piketty sees as "potentially terrifying."

What can—and should—be done about this problem? Again quoting Faux:

He sees no real alternative to global capitalism and has little interest in changing its inner workings through worker ownership, nationalization or the redevelopment of local or national markets. Like Keynes, his goal is to make markets a more efficient instruments for human progress. But although he supports the standard progressive agenda of financial regulation, public investment in education and infrastructure and aid to the poor, he thinks that in a globalized economy, capital is now beyond the control of any one country—even the United States. Efforts by individual nations to constrain capital will just chase away highly mobile private investment.

The ultimate solution, he writes, is a worldwide progressive tax on private capital.

As an economist, Piketty appears to be rather progressive. What's obvious about the world—*intellectual* world, that is—that Piketty lives in, however, is that *global warming* is not occurring in it. *That* fact is highly significant, for it means that the paper used to print his book is a wasted resource; it would have been better to have left stand the trees that were cut to make the paper for his book—given the likelihood that global warming will be wiping out most of the world's population—perhaps *all* of it!—within a few decades.

Carolyn Baker [recently said this](#) about our likely future:

despite the [efforts](#) of some nations to “do something” about climate change, the harsh, cold (no pun intended) reality is that it is too little too late. Halldor Thorgeirsson, Senior Director of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change [remarked](#) in September, 2013, stated, “We are failing as an international community. We are not on track.” Now realizing the dire state of warming due to inaction on climate change, the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change (IPCC) [asserts](#) that “Global warming is irreversible without massive geoengineering of the atmosphere’s chemistry.” Of course, we already know that there is probably nothing that geo-engineering cannot make worse—for example the radical altering of [rainfall patterns](#) and the assertion by [Live Science](#) that “Current schemes to minimize the havoc caused by global warming by purposefully manipulating Earth’s climate are likely to either be relatively useless or actually make things worse, researchers say in a new study.” And earlier this month, *Skeptical Science* published an article entitled, [“Alarming New Study Makes Today’s Climate Change More Comparable To Earth’s Worst Mass Extinction.”](#) Moreover, according to the National Academy of Sciences [“A Four-Degree Rise Will End Vegetation ‘Carbon Sink’ Research Suggests.”](#)

[Guy R. McPherson](#)—Professor Emeritus of Natural Resources and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona is even *more* pessimistic about our future: In the Introduction to his [Going Dark](#) (2013) he states:

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

He then lists, and discusses, three reasons why he believes we are headed for extinction:

- “global climate change”
- “environmental collapse”
- “nuclear meltdown” (He explains: “Safely shuttering a nuclear power plant requires a decade or two of careful planning. Far sooner, we’ll complete the ongoing collapse of the industrial economy. This is a source of my nuclear nightmares.)

Dr. McPherson may be right in declaring that our species is headed toward extinction; my position, however, is that because that is not a *certainty*, we should assume that at least *some* of us can be “saved” (from extinction), and proceed accordingly.

Conceivably, either the quick introduction (e.g., within a decade) of “safe” sources of energy or the implementation of geo-engineering measures (or a combination of both) could “save” our species from utter decimation. The *problems* with such a belief, however, are that:

- We likely have *little time* to make the necessary adjustments (assuming, that is, that it is not *already* too late to do so—but we can’t know for sure)!

- Our so-called “leaders” are showing little inclination to recognize the seriousness of the problem posed by global warming. If or when they *do* “wake up,” it will *certainly* be too late for them to play a “[Cnut the Great](#)” role.

What do those two facts (or at least *likely* facts) imply for us “ordinary” citizens? And is there a way of responding to these facts that will *simultaneously* respond to the [growing inequality](#) problem in our society?—the [fact, e.g., that](#) “As of 2010, the top 1% of households (the upper class) owned 35.4% of all privately held wealth” in this country.



I can think of just one *reasonable* possibility, and that is for individuals to either move to an [existing eco-community](#) (see [this site](#), for example)—one where global warming is taken seriously—or to get together with a few others to *create* such a community. Pursuing this option would mean a reduced “standard of living,” of course, but at least *might* mean that one would be able to survive. I say “might” rather than “would” because there are no guarantees here.

It would be best, however, to push *that* possibility out of one’s mind and proceed with the eco-community option—believing that “salvation” is possible. If, in doing so, one is also careful to create institutions that will prevent inequality from arising—which should be possible with a small community—one will solve one

of the critical problems facing our society currently, the fact that it is becoming increasingly inegalitarian.

Such a community must also, however, be designed with global warming in mind, which would mean (at minimum):

- Striving to make the community as “community-sufficient” as possible. After all, [societal collapse](#) is likely to occur within a few decades, meaning that one will no longer be able to go “shopping” to obtain what one needs for survival. Once societal collapse occurs, unless the community one lives in is able to provide for the needs of its inhabitants, those individuals will die from starvation, disease, or violence (including suicides). If a *movement* gets underway of creating eco-communities, a time may arise when trading among nearby communities will be possible, enabling each to specialize somewhat—thereby enabling an improved “standard of living” for survivors.
- Planning with the vagaries of the weather conditions associated with global warming in mind. This would involve constructing buildings to withstand damage from severe

storms, planning food production with the possibility of excessive rain, too little rain, hail storms, etc. in mind—which might involve a greater reliance on meat from domestic animals than is now common (given the difficulty of growing crops), growing plants in [greenhouses](#), and learning to “hunt and gather.”

There would be no *guarantee* that one survive if one follows the above advice, but I am convinced that one will *not* survive if one does *not* do so.

In-Kleined to Disagree!

Alton C. Thompson

Naomi Klein [recently declared](#) that:

Climate change is a collective problem demanding collective action the likes of which humanity has never actually accomplished.

And:

If the ideas that rule our culture are stopping us from saving ourselves, then it is within our power to change those ideas.

Wrong on both counts! Let me explain:

It's a truism, of course, that "climate change"—or, as I prefer, "global warming"—is a "collective problem" in the sense that although some are more responsible for its occurrence than others, *all* of us are affected by it.

But does it follow from the fact that it is a *collective* problem that it "demands" collective *action*? Of more relevance is to ask: "Granted that global warming is a problem that affects us all; does that mean that:

1. Collective action *will*, then, occur?
2. Is it even *conceivable* that collection action will occur?
3. If not, will our *leaders*, then, engage in the necessary actions?
4. If *they* will not, *then* what?!

Let me respond briefly to each of these questions:

1. Just because global warming is a collective problem, it does not follow from that fact that collective action will occur to address that problem.
2. In fact, it's not even *conceivable* that the fact that global warming *will* affect (and is *already* affecting) everybody will result in *everyone* becoming involved in *addressing* the problem.

3. It *is* conceivable that our “leaders” will address the problem, given that they have the *capability* to so do. However, they have been showing no inclination to provide any sort of meaningful leadership—so that it would be foolish to wait for *them* to act!
4. What that leaves us with, then, is the necessity of *individuals*—acting either as individuals or as members of private groups—to engage in “meaningful” actions.

This last point leads to an *additional* highly important point:

If those with the authority and capability to respond meaningfully to this problem fail to do so, it is likely that “runaway” change will begin soon (if it has not already started!—we can’t know for sure), the ultimate result being a severe decimation of the human population—with the possibility of our species going the way of the dinosaurs (but for different reasons).

Indeed, Guy McPherson, Professor Emeritus of Natural Resources and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona, states in the Introduction to his [*Going Dark*](#) (2013):

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

McPherson, then, seemingly suggests not only that our “leaders” will *not* address this problem in any meaningful way, but that even *individual* actions are likely to be futile. McPherson may be right about this; my problem with this statement, however, is that it implies that we should simply sit back and wait for a rather unpleasant end to our lives. My position, though, is that so long as there is *hope* for some degree of “salvation,” we (acting as *individuals*, that is) should act in an attempt to “save” ourselves.

Klein attributes our current problem with global warming to “the ideas that rule our culture,” and asserts that “it is within our power to change those ideas.” I will grant that (as Morris Berman notes in his [*Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline*](#), 2011) the ideas associated with “economic liberalism”—with its orientation to so-called “free markets”—have played a huge role in shaping our society. I would add, however, that:

- It is our *way of life* that is *directly* responsible for the global warming problem, with the ideas associated with “economic liberalism” playing an *indirect* role.
- Although our way of life developed in response to “economic liberalism,” that “philosophy” goes back at least to the sixteenth century, and *will* not be changed “overnight.” The possibility that “it is within our power to change those ideas” is just that, merely a *possibility*: It is highly unrealistic to think that “those ideas” can—and will—be changed within a few years—which is what *would* need to occur to avert catastrophe (assuming that to even be possible).

- Even if “our ideas” *could* be changed quickly (dream on!), changing our way of life to one based on “safe” energy sources would be a mammoth task, one that would be impossible to accomplish before “runaway” change got underway.

Unrealistic “answers” are, in my mind, worse than denials, for they lull people into believing that *others* will be solving the problems they face—such as the collective problem of global warming.

Therefore, let me, then, repeat my No. 4 “response”:

What that leaves us with, then, is the necessity of individuals—acting either as individuals or as members of private groups—to engage in “meaningful” actions.

As to what sorts of activities might constitute “meaningful” ones, see [this](#), for example.

"Ordinary" People and Global Warming

Alton C. Thompson

Global warming dwarfs—by far!—all other problems that we Americans—we *humans*, in fact—face today. Yet one would never guess this by conversing with others, reading a newspaper, watching television, etc. If anything, in fact, one is more likely to encounter adamant “deniers” more frequently than passionate “believers” (in global warming). Perhaps [Sigmund Freud](#) was right in asserting that we humans have a “[death drive](#)”!

We encounter “deniers” in large part because officials/investors in the fossil fuel business tend to be “possessed” individuals, with a fixation on the short-run “bottom line.” They are individuals who are somehow able, evidently, to ignore the fact that “we are all in this together.” As a result of their determination to continue in the fossil fuel business, they buy spokespersons—in politics, “journalism,” etc.—who are able to convince people in a certain category that they are hearing the truth. (Their susceptibility to this propaganda² may *directly* reflect some of their *personal* characteristics, but the *nature* of the society—along with their “position” within it—may be more decisive in explaining this susceptibility.)

So far as “believers” are concerned, they tend to fall into *two* categories. On the one hand are those who are optimistic—*overly* optimistic, I would say—about our ability to overcome the problem of global warming; and on the other hand are those who realize global warming’s utter seriousness—the likelihood that it will wipe out *most* members of our species in a matter of years, with the possibility that it will render our species extinct (along with numerous other species, of course).

Those in the first of these two categories seem to be more numerous than those in the second category (perhaps because it is so tempting to be in “denial” regarding this problem!)—and to have a larger audience. These two facts—their over-optimism, combined with a larger audience—do not, needless to say, bode well for the future of our species!

The general public’s ignorance about global warming is undoubtedly a function of (a) a lack of media coverage, (b) media coverage that downplays the seriousness of the global warming

² George Orwell [said this](#) about propaganda: “A message does not have to be untrue to qualify as propaganda. In fact, the message in modern propaganda is often not blatantly untrue. But even if the message conveys only ‘true’ information, it will generally contain partisan bias and fail to paint a complete and balanced picture.” This statement remind me of the [advertising](#) currently (2014) being done by BP Petroleum—which emphasizes the *employment* provided by the company, but fails to mention the *pollution* involved in *using* their products.

problem, and (c) efforts by the fossil fuel companies and their lackeys to *suppress* accurate information about global warming, while publicizing *misinformation* regarding the subject.

There may, however, be an additional factor at work here. With *individual* problems—e.g., obesity, illness, unemployment—the problem is easily *observable* (with unemployment being somewhat of an exception). *That* fact does not, however, mean an accurate *explanation* can be given for the problem in question. In fact, the *tendency*, in explaining problems associated with individuals, is to use a “[blame the victim](#)” approach (which, of course, is exactly what one would expect in a “Christian” country!).

That is, if a person is obese, the explanation likely to be offered is that the person not only eats too much, but eats the wrong foods. If a person is ill (e.g., has some form of cancer), the explanation likely to be offered is that the person has chosen to engage in bad habits (e.g., smoking cigarettes, getting insufficient rest, bad eating habits, insufficient exercise). If a person is unemployed, “average” people may explain this by referring to the person’s alleged “laziness,” while employers may argue that the person lacks the proper training/education to obtain a job. In short, the onus—the blame—is placed on the *individual* involved: An individual with a problem is held responsible for having that problem.

Despite the fact that most in our society tend to use a “blame the victim” approach in explaining individual problems—which conveniently excuses them from trying to do anything to help those with problems!—a more *accurate* explanation in many, if not most, such cases would be that the *society within which one lives* is the real culprit. Such an idea is implicit in the phrase “[diseases of civilization](#)”—which suggests that the diseases unique to civilized societies are caused by the *nature* of those societies. And as a recent study [argues forcefully](#), the *inequality* that is becoming such a prominent feature of our society *is itself* a major causal factor in explaining many of the health problems that currently exist in our society.

Most people in our society will not become aware of that study; and even if a person *does* become aware of the study, the person may find it incomprehensible, and so let the study’s findings “go in one ear and out the other”—i.e., have absolutely no impact on the person’s thinking about disease.

I suspect that the same is true regarding global warming—a problem for which we can identify real-world *individual* culprits, with a more realistic explanation, however, being that our *way of life* is the culprit, with virtually *all* of us being guilty parties.

Global warming is a relatively easy phenomenon to deny—which fact makes it easy those who *assert* vociferously that global warming is a “hoax” to be believed by many. After all, global warming is not *immediately* observable, for it has both temporal and geographical “dimensions.” Its existence is inferred from *instrumental* observations made at various locations around the world (the [Mauna Loa Observatory](#) in particular—with the late [Charles Keeling](#) beginning to

make measurements there in 1958), over a period of time, in conjunction with a knowledge of physical laws.

The average person can observe vagaries in the weather from year to year at the location of that person's residence, but relating those vagaries to "global warming" is another matter: Unless one has a certain level of education and reads some of the relevant literature—such as Prof. Guy McPherson's "[Climate-Change Summary and Update](#)"—one will lack an *understanding* of global warming. As a consequence, if one hears one's favorite "talk show" host state, with confidence, that "global warming is a total hoax," and that host then quotes "experts" to support his claim, one will tend to believe what the host has said. And given that one doesn't really *understand* what it is that one is accepting, one will tend to *cling* to that belief, and be resistant to claims to the contrary.

When it comes to perceiving a problem as having a *societal*, rather than an *individual*, cause, most people will have difficulty perceiving the problem from that perspective. Likewise, when a problem has a *global* scope—as global warming does (the reason for the "global" in the term!)—they will not only have trouble *perceiving* it as such. *Because* of that fact, in conjunction with difficulties they have in *understanding* the phenomenon, they will be rather easily convinced that global warming is a "hoax" being perpetrated on them by "pointy-headed—and also communist!—intellectuals."

This is an *unfortunate* fact, but a fact nonetheless—and another reason why it is difficult to have any degree of optimism regarding the human future.

[Sent to Guy's site; 114 comments as on 5/9/2014.]

Five Reasons “For,” One “Against”

Alton C. Thompson

And the winner is . . . “one against”!

According to Juan Cole, there are at least “[5 Reasons Solar Energy Will Save the World](#).” This article heading appears under the heading:



Since Cole has *declared* his 5 reasons to be examples of “informed comment,” I guess that we should *accept* them as such. (Just kidding!)

Before making a decision as to whether or not we should accept his 5 reasons as “gospel,” it would only be fair to begin here by noting what they are. Briefly:

1. “The research and development monies now going into solar energy are great enough to fuel innovation and bring down prices rapidly.”
2. “Honda is experimenting with a zero-carbon home.”
3. “[Thin-skin solar panels will be installed directly on the cars](#), and a canopy recharger will fill them back up.”
4. “Even poor countries of the global South like Pakistan are finding it affordable now to [create enormous solar parks](#).”
5. “After seeing the way Russia is bullying Western Europe over opposition in Brussels to Russia grabbing Ukrainian territory, with Russia threatening to cut off natural gas, many countries will be encouraged to invest in renewable energy sources that cannot be cut off.”

Wow! Now I will be able to sleep “like a baby” tonight, with no fear whatsoever of the future! (Again, just kidding!)

I’m not sure what literature Cole has been reading lately, but it is clear that he hasn’t read this statement by Guy McPherson, who states in the Introduction to his [Going Dark](#) (2013):

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

Whose views regarding the human future are more believable, those of *Cole*—a Professor of History whose specialties are the Middle East and South Asia—or *McPherson*—a Professor Emeritus of Natural Resources and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona?

The answer to this question is too obvious to state!

What Prof. Cole doesn't seem to realize is that unless alternate technologies, such as solar, were to replace fossil fuels as an energy source within just a few years, *and* geo-engineering measures (e.g., carbon extraction) were to be implemented—and successfully!—on a massive scale, again within a few years, “runaway” climate change will occur, resulting in a severe culling of the human population—perhaps to the point of extinction.

This leads us to the key question: What is the likelihood of these “events” occurring? Unless I am drastically misreading our current political situation, with Pres. O'Bomber (sp.?!), at the helm, I would say that the likelihood is 0—i.e., ZERO!

Prof. Cole, why, then, are you trying to build our *optimism*, when you *should* be trying to help us think more *realistically*?!

[Sent to BNW site on April 24, 2014]

Are We Doomed to Oligarchic Control?

Alton C. Thompson

Bill Moyers and Michael Winship, in their "[Government is Now a Protection Racket for the 1%](#)," note that:

there's. . . [a] big study coming out in the fall from scholars at Princeton and Northwestern universities, based on data collected between 1981 and 2002. Their [conclusion](#): "America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened... The preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." Instead, policy tends "to tilt towards the wishes of corporations and business and professional associations."

And they conclude their article by declaring:

The drift toward oligarchy that [French economist] Thomas Piketty describes in his formidable new book on capital [[Capital in the Twenty-First Century](#)] has become a mad dash. It will overrun us, unless we stop it.

Their "unless we stop it" remark suggests at least three questions, however:

- Who is this mysterious "we"?
- *Can* "we" stop this trend?
- Is it even *necessary* that we try to stop this trend, given the possibility that it will stop at some point soon for reasons *other* than stoppage by "we"?

It is easy to become preoccupied with events occurring in the present (such as our current "drift toward oligarchy)—in part because such events are "newsworthy," I suppose. When one listens to the radio, reads a newspaper, watches television, or even visits most web sites, including "progressive" ones, one typically finds such a preoccupation. The assumption with these media seems to be:

1. People are interested only in "current events."
2. Given that we are running a business, or at least want to have readers/viewers, we must *cater* to that interest.

3. In doing so we recognize that the future may be very different from the present, but we can't allow that knowledge to affect how we run our business. We must *continue* to concentrate on current events.
4. Therefore, we will continue to do as we have been doing, with the hope of ever expanding our readership/viewership.

In 1930 famed economist John Maynard Keynes [wrote](#):

The prevailing world depression, the enormous anomaly of unemployment in a world full of wants, the disastrous mistakes we have made, blind us to what is going on under the surface to the true interpretation of the trend of things. For I predict that both of the two opposed errors of pessimism which now make so much noise in the world will be proved wrong in our own time—the pessimism of the revolutionaries who think that things are so bad that nothing can save us but violent change, and the pessimism of the reactionaries who consider the balance of our economic and social life so precarious that we must risk no experiments.

([Keynes](#) is the economist who famously said, in 1923, “[In the long run we are all dead](#).”)

Writing during the Great Depression, when pessimism was common (*two types* of pessimism, he noted), he argued that both types would be “proved wrong in our own time.” Moyers and Winship, however, writing 84 years later, but with a somewhat different focus, point out that there is little basis for optimism *now*—the implication of that fact being that we should cease our preoccupation with present events, and begin thinking about creating a better future. We should “stop it,” the “mad dash” toward oligarchy, that is. Perhaps this is what they *imply*, but is this actually what they *mean*? Let us give this question some attention.

To return to the three questions that I asked earlier in response to their “stopping a mad dash”:

1. The “we” they are presumably referring to is us citizens.
2. “We” *should* stop the trend toward oligarchy by (a) urging our elected officials to act on our behalf, and (b) working to elect members of the House of Representatives and Senate who will truly represent us. Moyers and Winship are not *explicit* on this matter, but this is a reasonable *interpretation* of what they mean in asserting that we must “stop this mad dash toward oligarchy.”
3. Not only *should* we stop this trend, but we *can*—by engaging in the activities specified under point 2 above.

But *can* we do so (by engaging in the above-mentioned activities)? Is it even *necessary* to do so, in fact? My answer to these questions is, first, that the elite has such a firm grip over our governmental officials, that it would be simply *foolish* to engage in the sorts of activities

recommended (implicitly) by Moyers and Winship. Granted that the need to “do something” is a strong one with many; but that need is too often expressed in futile activities.

What’s needed, rather, is a view of the “bigger picture”—which today is dominated by the facts that (a) global warming is occurring, is (b) likely to accelerate within a few years (assuming, that is, that acceleration has not *already* begun!—we can know for sure only in retrospect), resulting in (c) the collapse of virtually all societies world-wide, with a (d) severe culling of the world’s population being likely, while and after this occurs.

Implicit here is the fact that the oligarchy problem that currently plagues us *will* definitely go away fairly soon—for the simple reason that our society will be collapsing within a matter of years! Once one comes to realize this very real possibility, one *can* (but won’t *necessarily*!) re-orient one’s thinking. Rather than *bemoaning* the fact of current oligarchic dominance, one can begin to *anticipate* its demise—i.e., look forward to its necessary disappearance.

One must not allow one’s improved mood to *stop* there, however—for the simple reason that societal collapse will not only mean the demise of our *oligarchy*, but the demise of *many others* as well. In fact, that “many others” group is likely to include *oneself* unless one realizes that one must now act to at least *try* to “save” oneself (along with members of one’s family, one’s friends, etc.).

How? As I have commented on this matter in many previous essays (e.g., [this one](#)), I will say nothing about that matter here.

[Sent to [BNW](#) web site on 4/26/2014, DV, and Guy's on 4/28/2014]]

The “Environmental Justice” Illusion

Alton C. Thompson

Environmental justice is defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, age, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.”

The above statement occurs in “[Environmental Justice: A Promise for Sustainable-Livable Communities](#),” by Schnequa N. Diggs, who was a Ph.D. student in public administration at Florida Atlantic University at the time of the article’s writing (2011). The goal of Environmental Justice would seem to be a non-controversial one in a country within which government [of, by, and for the people](#) is, and has been, prized—[ostensibly](#). The [fact of the matter](#), however, is that “there is substantial evidence that people of colour in the USA bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards.” For example, [consider this](#):

Ten solid waste sites (five incinerators, five landfills) were in operation in the city of Houston from the 1920s until the early 1970s, when they were shut down due to high costs of operation. Of these ten sites, nine were located in predominantly black communities. The remaining site was located in a predominantly Hispanic community.

The authors of this study then ask:

If nobody wants these facilities, then how is their location determined? City officials tend to follow the “path of least resistance” when determining which community will receive a site. . . . the “path of least resistance” usually points to a predominantly black community. This has unquestionably been the case in the city of Houston.

The principle in operation with toxic wastes—that those most responsible for *generating* the wastes tend to be *least* affected by their siting—also seems to be operating with global warming, with one important difference, however: Although the “advanced” countries of the world are most *responsible* for generating greenhouse gases (on a per capita basis), and residents of less advanced countries have borne most of the deleterious *effects* of that generation so far, *everyone* on earth will, *eventually*, be feeling those effects. In fact, Guy McPherson, a Professor Emeritus of Natural Resources and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona states the following in the Introduction of his [Going Dark](#), (2013).

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

McPherson is not alone, among scientists, in having a dismal view of our future prospects as humans, and the same is true for individuals such as [Paul Kingsnorth](#) (formerly associated with [The Ecologist](#))—for many years an activist, but who [has recently concluded](#) that activism is futile.



However, as a crest that I have adopted for myself (“confiscated” from some internet site!), has associated with it the motto “[Dom Spiro Spero](#)” (“As long as I breathe, I have hope”), and as I have five grandchildren, I refuse to give up hope for the future. I agree with those climate scientists who project a severe culling of the world’s population during the next few decades ([as much as 90%](#) per Britain’s [Kevin Anderson](#)), but believe it at least conceivable that at least a “[remnant](#)” can be spared—those who have begun to engage in pre-adaptive activities (whether deliberately and consciously, or inadvertently—as with the Amish, perhaps).

In light of what the future likely holds for us humans, engaging in “environmental justice” activities is a rather pointless exercise. Its orientation is to “environmental laws, regulations and policies”—so that those activities are all basically irrelevant considering that:

- Given the inaction of governments—our government in particular—on this issue, despite the fact that [Guy Callendar](#) began warning about global warming over 75 years ago (in 1938!), it’s likely that “[runaway](#)” [climate change](#) will begin within two or three decades,
- resulting in societal collapse on a worldwide scale, with most of the world’s population being wiped out.

Given the high probability of (a) “runaway” climate change, (b) societal collapse throughout the world, and (c) an utter decimation of the world’s population, working to develop, implement, and enforce laws—environmental or whatever—is an utterly foolish way to use one’s time. Even highly intelligent and educated people (e.g., economist [Thomas Piketty](#)) are ignoring the “[handwriting on the wall](#),” so that those in the “environmental justice game” are by no means alone in being “[foolish virgins](#).” *That* fact does not, however, not make their efforts any less foolish, irrelevant!

The “salvation” that has relevance today is that of salvation from a premature death, and I see only the following three “paths” to salvation (insofar as salvation is even *possible*, I should add):

1. Become a [homesteader](#).
2. With other individuals/families form a “[homestead colony](#)” (a term originated by [Ralph Borsodi](#)).

3. Move to an existing [“intentional” community](#), or form one with other individuals and/or families. Note that this would involve an [“exodus”](#) of sorts!

Whichever option is chosen, two goals, at minimum, would need to be sought: (1) Becoming as self-sufficient, economically, as possible and (2) anticipating the effects of global warming (for the production of food, for access to water, for surviving severe storms, etc.). In addition, given that our existing society is rotten in so many respects, I advocate that those taking either option 2 or 3—but especially those taking option 3—recognize the reality of human “design specifications” (see pp. 38 – 117 in [this eBook](#)), and include that subject in their planning efforts.

I should note that a point made in that eBook is that a variety of views exist as to what our “design specifications” as humans are, and rather than bemoaning that fact one should welcome it, for that diversity provides a basis for discussion, and *joint* decision-making in coming to conclusions as to what, specifically, to *believe*, and then *do*, about this matter. Members of a group deciding to create an eco-community for themselves would, of course, have a large number of decisions to make, and [this essay of mine](#) discusses some of the major ones.

Despite the fact that most in our society—including those in the environmental justice movement—are likely to be a “hard sell” with the above proposal, so that even *trying* to “sell” it might be an utter waste of time, still there is the possibility that the eco-communities created in response to the proposal will act as [“cities upon a hill”](#)—at least in the sense that some people in seeing them and visiting them will, like [“doubting Thomas,”](#) come to the realization that this is a good idea after all, and will also adopt the idea.

If this occurs, Kevin Anderson’s projection of a 90% culling of the world’s population might, conceivably, be reduced to less than 80%, but I foresee *no possibility whatsoever* of a percent much less than 80% being “saved.”

That is a sad projection to make, to be sure. But if [my strategy for societal system change](#), published in 1984 (!), had been implemented shortly after the publication of that article, there would now be no need for me to have written this essay! However, it *wasn’t*, so that there *is* a need for me to write this essay after all.

The odds seem stacked against us humans at present, but given that we cannot know, with certainty, how the world will be in, say, 2050 CE, it would be best to assume that we—*some* of us, at any rate—can “make it,” and proceed with confidence that we *will* do so. What I would like to see happen is the initiation of an eco-communitarian movement. In my article of 1984 (alluded to above) I had *retirees* forming the first and second “waves.” Now, 30 years later, I have a somewhat different perspective: My dream now is to create an institute—the [Nicholas Winston](#) Institute—to foster the development of eco-communities, with the participants recruited primarily, if not exclusively, from the homeless population. The name chosen for the Institute would indicate its “salvific” intent—to save homeless people from a life of desolation, and to save at least a remnant of the world’s population from extinction.

Inequality: A *Truly* Serious Problem!

Alton C. Thompson

In previous collapses, we see some similar patterns. The doomed societies overextended themselves environmentally. They depleted their natural resources at an unsustainable pace—and failed to see, despite their sophistication, the warning signs of their impending implosion. They soldiered on, oblivious to the danger.

Or rather, to be more precise, the **elite movers and shakers** of these societies soldiered on. In deeply unequal societies, elites seldom feel the strain and pain that environmental degradation engenders—until that degradation has gone too far to reverse.

[Emphasis added.]

So states Sam Pizzigati in his recent “[Why Our Sky Sometimes Does Start Falling](#)” using as his source a [paper](#) by Safa Totescharrei and two other scholars. What’s interesting about the above statements by Pizzigati is that they suggest some important questions about *causation*, with the answers to those questions having important implications for *decision-making* (by *individuals* in particular).

Let me illustrate these points with specific reference to global warming. In *explaining* why global warming is becoming a problem, and is seemingly destined to become *increasingly* a problem, a variety of explanations are possible, among them these three:

1. Humans are “pouring” “greenhouse gases” into the atmosphere through their burning of fossil fuels (and deforestation activities) at a rate greater than “carbon sinks” can absorb them. As a result, greenhouse gases are accumulating in the lower atmosphere, acting as a barrier to long-wave heat energy re-radiated from Earth, thereby resulting in global warming (i.e., an increase in the global mean *temperature*, an increase in the *number* of storms, an increase in their *severity*, and increased *variability* in weather conditions—making weather prediction ever more difficult thereby).
2. The *way of life* that we have developed over the years has become increasingly dependent on fossil fuels—coal first, and then petroleum products. Because the burning of fossil fuels results in the addition of an increasing amount of carbon—in the form of CO₂ especially—that addition, only some of it being absorbed by carbon sinks, results in a disturbance of Earth System, which manifests itself in the various phenomena associated with “global warming.”

3. As societies become more and more developed, in response to the increased use of fossil fuels as energy sources, they also become increasingly *stratified* socially. An implication of this is that the elite becomes increasingly dominant, increasingly in control of the society's affairs. Because the elite tends, however, to *insulate* itself from the effects of global warming, it tends not to become *aware* of those effects—or, in learning about the effects of global warming on *others*, tends simply to *ignore* what it has learned. As a consequence, the problem of global warming does not get addressed by those with the influence to do so—until, perhaps, it is too late to do anything meaningful.

The “message” of this third point is that members of the elite not only bear significant responsibility for *why* the problem of global warming exists, but for why it is unlikely to be *addressed* meaningfully by our “leaders”—in time, at any rate. What this third explanation does, in other words, is put somewhat of a “face” on the problem—which “face” has important implications for those of us who are merely “ordinary” citizens:

1. The first of the three explanations above simply blames “humans” for the problem, and might be thought of as implicitly suggesting that national governments not only *should* address the problem, but *will* do so.
2. The second explanation blames our “way of life” rather than any specific segment of the population, and therefore seemingly implies that it is *hopeless* to look for a solution to the problem—for, after all, we “can’t” give up our way of life. In effect, this explanation counsels despair, with its associated inaction.
3. The third explanation recognizes that some individuals in a society have more influence in a society than others; and as I stated earlier, this tendency is becoming ever more acute. By placing some blame on the “elite” it puts somewhat of a “face” on those bearing responsibility for the problem. More importantly, however, it suggests that those with the power to address the problem are *unlikely to do so*—until, perhaps, it is too late to do anything significant.

This final point is important to recognize, for it suggests that we will be sliding inexorably toward societal collapse, with a consequent severe culling of the human population—perhaps to the point of extinction.

Once one recognizes this, one is faced with only two choices:

1. Accept the inevitable—and “live, drink, and be merry” until one is among those culled by global warming.
2. Make an attempt to engage in pre-adaptive activities, in the hope that one will be “saved” from destruction. What this might involve especially is joining an existing eco-

community that will accept you—one whose members *acknowledge* the threat posed by global warming, and seem to have good ideas regarding how to *respond* to that threat; or join with others in *creating* an eco-community designed (one believes) to withstand the ravages of global warming.

As Jared [Diamond has noted](#), societal collapse is by no means a unique event in world history—so that it is foolish for one to believe that living in an “advanced” society will protect one from that possibility. And as Elizabeth [Kolbert has noted](#), so far in geological history there have been five major extinctions (the [Permian Extinction](#) being especially notable), with the strong possibility that we are now in the Sixth Extinction—with the *further* possibility that this one will be our “[swan song](#).”

Global warming can be explained on different “levels,” but the third one briefly discussed above has especial importance because it helps us recognize that:

1. Our “leaders” bear some responsibility for the global warming problem; more importantly, however, although they have the *legal* responsibility to address the problem, and the *power* to so do, they are unlikely to respond to the problem in any meaningful way.
2. It follows from these facts, that **one’s only hope for “salvation” comes from (a) *acting as an individual (or group member)*, and (b) *doing so in an appropriate manner*.**

Even if one *does* engage in actions that would seem “appropriate,” there is no guarantee that one will survive. But if being a “human” means anything, it means that one will not allow the possibility that one will *not* survive the ravages of global warming deter one from at least *trying* to “save” oneself (along with the members of one’s family, one’s friends, etc.) from those ravages.

[Sent to Guy's site on 4/29/2014]

Societal Collapse Couldn't Come Sooner?

Alton C. Thompson

The Senate Intelligence Committee and the Obama administration agree on this: the American people should not know the number of people killed by U.S. drone attacks overseas, nor should they hope to understand the circumstances under which such lethal killings are authorized or executed.

This high-level agreement was confirmed on Monday [April 28, 2014] after a "modest" provision designed to add transparency to the US drone assassination program was killed in the Senate committee following objections by the Obama administration's intelligence chief.

The [above outrageous fact](#) is further proof that we are moving inexorably in a fascist direction. What's so frustrating about this development for us "ordinary" people is that this development is "out of our hands." True, we could send emails to our Senators indicating our extreme displeasure with this turn of event, but there is absolutely no reason to believe that such an effort would be productive. Our country has degenerated into a situation of *elite control*, with our two major political parties in effect becoming "Tweedledumb" and "Tweedledumber," so that there is little point in even voting anymore!

In their speechmaking, the candidates for the Democratic Party may sound very different from their counterparts in the Republican Party, but once in office the label tends to become meaningless—especially for "Democrats" such as Pres. Barracks O'Bomber (sp.?!)

A *moral* question that arises here is: "Which is better? The *deliberate* killing of a "few" individuals each year via our continuing military 'adventurism,' or the severe culling of *most* of the world's population (perhaps *all* of it!) that is likely to occur within the next few decades as a result of global warming?"

In addressing that question a useful starting point is to discuss the matter of *culpability*—given that it is only appropriate to apply the judgments "good" and "bad" to an action if a definite perpetrator(s) of that action can be clearly identified. *Events*, in addition to *actions*, can be judged as either "good" or "bad," with the same basis for judgment—i.e., that "good" actions or events contribute to the well-being of those affected, "bad" actions do the opposite. With events, however, it is difficult, if not possible, to identify *responsibility* (the appropriate term here being *culpability* in the case of events judged to be "bad").

From a *culpability* standpoint, the killing that occurs via our military activities—such as drone strikes—can be attributed to a few individuals—the President, and those members of Congress

who have voted to support those activities. Those of us who are “mere” voters should not feel culpability for the actions of “our” representatives—unless (a) we voted for candidates who ran on a platform of military adventurism, (b) those candidates won their elections, and then (c) themselves voted in a manner consistent with their platforms. If, however, (a) one voted for candidates with a *contrary* platform, (b) those candidates won, but then (c) themselves became “*turncoats*,” one should not feel culpable if the bills those “representatives” voted for passed. Rather, one should simply feel *betrayed*!

If culpability is a fairly clear-cut matter with military activities, with the number of those culpable being fairly small, global warming is another matter. In a very real sense our *way of life* (rather than specific individuals *per se*) is what’s *directly* responsible for the global warming occurring at present, given that it is dependent on a high per capita usage, direct and indirect, of fossil fuels. But our way of life developed over a long period of time in response to intellectual developments (e.g., “free market” ideology), scientific and technological developments (e.g., the steam engine), the very existence of fossil fuels, decision-making by individuals and corporations and governments, etc. Given this, culpability for the problem of global warming is virtually impossible to establish.

It appears, then, that if we are to provide an answer to the question posed earlier—is it better that our military kill just a “few” people than that global warming kill most?—we will need to ignore the question of culpability—because it leads nowhere (to allude to Samuel Butler’s [*Erewhon*](#)). We might, then, simply ask: “Would it be *preferable* that our military continue with its despicable intrusions into other parts of the world, thereby killing but a small portion of the world’s population, or, rather, that global warming wipe out most of the world’s population within a few decades?”

Fortunately, this is not a question that we *need* to answer, for global warming *will* be wiping out most of the world’s population “shortly”—perhaps *all* of it, in fact!—so this future “event” must simply be accepted as a “fact of life”—and regarded, therefore, as neither “good” nor “bad.” That “event” has a “good” element, in that our military will no longer (a) *have* anyone to kill any more, and (b) be *unable* to do any more killing, for the simple reason that it will no longer exist! Its *armaments* will continue to exist, of course, but there will be no one alive to “man” them.

The “wiping out operation” that will be performed by global warming does, though, have a “down side”—in that many innocents will have their lives cut short, including my five grandchildren. *That* fact pains me deeply, and I wish that I had a “magic wand” that would allow me to solve this problem in an instant. But I don’t—and for the rest of my life I will not be able to sleep well. In fact, I just had to wipe the tears from my eyes.

The fact that our prospects, as humans, are extremely dim should not, however, cause us to “give up,” refrain from “fighting back.” Rather, each of us aware of this problem, and aware of its severity, should use the abilities that we have to do what we can to enable at least some of our

fellow humans survive—ourselves, members of our families, our friends, and as many others as possible.

It may very well turn out that our efforts will be futile, but we cannot know that for sure until the “moment of truth” arrives. Perhaps, after all, it won’t—because of developments, unknown to anyone now, that occur that will enable a good portion of the world’s population to survive—but *none* of our military!

[Sent to Guy on 4/30/2014, then to DV.]

“So What!” I Say

Alton C. Thompson

[A] **new study**, by psychologist David Budescu of Fordham University and his colleagues, is actually the latest in a string of papers by these researchers showing that people systematically misunderstand what the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] means when it uses phrases such as “likely” and “very likely” to describe the strength of its conclusions. Take, for instance, the IPCC’s famous finding, **in 2007**, that “most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is *very likely* due to the observed increase in anthropogenic [human-produced] greenhouse gas concentrations.” According to Budescu’s research, while the IPCC intends for “very likely” to mean a greater than 90 percent likelihood, that’s not necessarily the message the average person hears. Instead, when Budescu and his colleagues asked members of the public to assign a probability to the term “very likely,” the mean estimate people gave was just 62 percent.

These [research findings](#) remind me of “[Arte](#)” Johnson’s German soldier character on the television [Laugh-In](#) program saying: “Verrrry interesting, but not very funny”—but replacing the “funny” with “relevant.”

This finding seems to suggest that *scientists* bear an important responsibility for our government’s lack of significant action relative to global warming—in that by not informing citizens properly regarding the threat posed by global warming, our citizens have not been applying pressure on our “leaders” to act decisively on this issue. My reactions to such a conclusion, however, are that:

- If scientists, in using the term “very likely” mean “greater than a 90 percent probability,” and the majority of citizens misinterpret the meaning that scientists give to the term, the responsibility for that misinterpretation lies with the journalists who *publicize* the findings of scientists. Journalists should have a degree of competence that on the one hand allows them to *understand* what their sources are saying/writing and, on the other hand, allows them to *translate* scientists’ findings in a manner that readers/viewers will understand. Thus, the problem here is not with scientists’ inability to convey their findings to the public (for they generally write for their *peers*, rather than the public) but, rather, with those whose job is convey scientific findings to the public—i.e., journalists.
- Even if journalists *would* do a good job in conveying the findings of *climate* scientists specifically to the public in an accurate and unambiguous manner, that would not be enough. As Guy McPherson stated in the Introduction of his [Going Dark](#) (2013):

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

I say “not enough” because *knowledge* of this very real possibility (including by climate scientists) should be regarded by those who gain it as not merely “stuff” to store in one’s memory—so that it can be recalled for future conversations with others. What the *gaining* of such knowledge *should* mean, rather, to those who acquire it is that **this is knowledge that needs to be acted upon.**

This conclusion is so obvious that one should not need to state it. Ironically, however, it is seemingly the case that most of those involved in *generating* such knowledge themselves don’t seem to “get” this! If they did, they would realize that the point is not to *continue* with their research but to recognize its *implications* for their *own* lives—the fact that such knowledge represents a *threat* to their future existence—so that from a *self-interest* standpoint they would abandon their research efforts and begin planning what to do to survive, and then act on those plans. After all, the prevailing “theory” is that we are self-interested creatures whose primary objective is to “look after No. 1.” The fact that highly educated climate scientists are *not* doing so (with a few exceptions) proves that that “theory” isn’t worth the “powder that it would take to blow it up” (as a former boss of mine—from Texas—was fond of saying).

Now if climate scientists don’t have the sense to act meaningfully on the findings of their research, why should it be surprising that those who are *aware* of their findings fail to do so as well? To a degree, of course, *journalists* can be blamed for failing to report the findings of scientists, and for not reporting those findings in a manner that the public will accurately grasp. But the *companies* that journalists work for bear *even more* culpability here for (a) not hiring competent journalists, (b) preventing them to report important scientific findings, and (c) forcing them to publish/present “watered down” versions of scientific findings—ones that, therefore, will not upset the advertisers that support the business, so that they withdraw their support of the business.

What should be clear to intelligent, educated people today is that the society they live in is likely to collapse within a few years, and that if they are to have any hope of surviving that calamity, they need to start engaging in *pre-adaptive activities*—and ASAP. Few *are* clear about this, seemingly, and the only logical explanation that I can think of for that fact is that most of us are so used to a lack of substantial change in our lives that we simply cannot *accept* the fact that change will come—whether we want it to or not.

This pervasive mentality is not likely to change, and I see no point in trying to get others to abandon this mode of thinking; that would be an utter waste of time. Rather, one must recognize that it is inevitable that societal collapse will be occurring, a massive culling of the world’s population will be occurring—both beyond one’s control; and that what’s necessary for (*possible*, not *certain*) survival is for one to start engaging in pre-adaptive activities.

[Sent to Guy's site on 4/30/2014.]

What Meritocracy?!

Alton C. Thompson

Those of us who were born and raised in the United States learned, as a part of our education, and just living here, that we were living in a *meritocracy*—a concept with Darwinian overtones. I say the latter because Charles Darwin, in discussing (monotypic) evolution in his [*The Origin of Species*](#) (1859—the Penn State .pdf file), had said (on p. 79 of the just-cited edition):

Let it be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life. Can it, then, be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should sometimes occur in the course of thousands of generations? If such do occur, can we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and of procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. This preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection.

I have commented on Darwin's [thinking in detail elsewhere](#), but at this point it will be useful to note, regarding the above statement by Darwin, first, that earlier in the book (pp. 12 – 13) Darwin had said:

In the next chapter the Struggle for Existence amongst all organic beings throughout the world, which inevitably follows from their high geometrical powers of increase, will be treated of. This is the doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms. As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form.

(The “Malthus” referred to here was [Thomas Malthus](#).)

What these two passages together “say” is that:

- With *any* given species nothing warranting the label “society” exists. Or, put another way, with any species there is a single *atomistic* society
- With any given species the food supply grows at a slower rate than does the population.

- The result of that “fact” is that when a “saturation” point is reached (so far as the local area’s ability to support the species occupying the area), the individuals comprising a species will compete with one another (*intra-specietal* competition) for the available supply of food.
- Those individuals who survive this competition will be those best “equipped” biologically to win over their fellows—while also having innate characteristics that enable them to “fit” the local environment. Thus, their “fitness” has a dual meaning.
- The surviving individuals will then produce progeny when they come of age, and the progeny, along with all other members of the species, will then compete for the available food, when the saturation point is reached again. (I say the latter because births and deaths will not necessarily be “in sync” from a temporal standpoint.)
- The result will be *genetic* change, over time, in the given species, which changes will be manifested in changes in observable *physical* (and mental) characteristics as well. That is, *monotypic* evolution will occur. (Note, then, that “natural selection” is *not* an explanation of evolution as that term is commonly understood—i.e., *polytypic* evolution.)

Although this is a patently flimsy argument based on speculation rather than empirical facts, containing patently absurd assumptions, this argument has been accepted, over the years, by a host of supposedly intelligent, well-educated people. A fact virtually impossible to believe—but true!! What makes this fact of universal acceptance particularly difficult to comprehend is that Darwin’s “conclusion” of universal intra-specific competition was delivered (what *should* have been) a death blow by Russian geographer [Peter Kropotkin](#) in a series of articles—between 1890 and 1896—in the periodical [Nineteenth Century](#), which articles were published in book form in his [Mutual Aid](#) (1902).

Implicit in Darwin’s concept (*not* properly termed a theory) of “natural selection” was the idea that the “best” reach the top, and that failure is the result of bad genes—i.e., that with any given species a “meritocracy” exists. That assumption then became the basis for the vicious “philosophy” of “[Social Darwinism](#),” a set of ideas developed especially by fellow Englishman [Herbert Spencer](#). That this set of ideas was in direct opposition with the pronouncements associated with Jesus in the canonical gospels was noticed by few—*another* curious fact regarding supposedly “Christian” societies!

One could very well argue that Social Darwinian ideas are still with us, if in a more muted form—in the *meritocratic* “philosophy.” Paul Buchheit, however, in a recent article on [the meritocracy myth](#), notes that rather than the rich in our society getting their riches as a result of *hard work*, the virtual opposite is the case—in that they especially derive their money from:

- 1. Betting on Food Prices to Rise**
- 2. Betting on Mortgages to Fail**
- 3. Renting Houses Back to People Who Lost Them**
- 4. Being a Banker**
- 5. Making "Can't Lose" Bets on Wall Street**
- 6. Checking the Stock Portfolio Every Morning**
- 7. Having the Right Friends and Relatives**

There's little of a meritocratic nature here!!

What can be done to solve this problem? The answer to this question is surprisingly simple: We need do *nothing*!

Why not? Because *Nature* will solve the problem for us! More precisely, *Nature-as-disturbed-by-us-humans* over the past two-plus centuries—via the various atmospheric phenomena associated with the term “global warming.”

Unfortunately, Nature's solution also has implications for the *rest* of us—in that it will not only wipe out (probably *all*) of the legal criminals who run our society within a few decades, if not years, but will wipe out *most of the rest of us* as well, with the strong possibility that it will render our species extinct. As the French might say, “*C'est la vie!*”

“Faith” and Global Warming

Alton C. Thompson

“Faith,” defined in a manner having relevance for global warming, and briefly, is assuming—*tacitly*, most commonly—that the relative uneventfulness of *today* will be repeated *tomorrow*.

More specifically, if the day in question is a Monday, and one works Monday-Friday, one's “faith” will be the expectation that Tuesday-Friday will be much like today. If, though, today is Friday, one will tend to have “faith” that tomorrow will be much like previous Saturdays (unless one has developed special plans for tomorrow), and that Sunday will be much like previous Sundays (again, unless one has special plans for the coming Sunday—such as attending the football game between the Green Bay Packers and Chicago Bears!).

Despite one's “faith” that tomorrow, e.g., will much like today, or will “go as planned,” one's faith—i.e., one's *expectations*—often do not coincide very closely with the events that actually transpire. At times these “deviations” are too minor to be upsetting. At other times, however, one's faith about tomorrow is rudely shattered. For example, one may be planning a birthday party for one's daughter on Saturday of next week, but before Saturday arrives, one of the children invited to the party is killed by a hit-and-run driver.

Having faith that the future will be much like the past has a *calming* effect on a person that only major disturbances will affect significantly. The reason for this is that our bodies are “built” for an *equable* day to day existence. Given that fact, if one were faced each day, instead, with great uncertainty, and experienced chaos each day, our immune systems would be in continuous “high gear” (even at night while in bed—preventing a “good night's rest”), and our lives would be cut short as a consequence, for our bodily systems would not be able to cope with such a situation for very long: Not being “designed” for such an existence—being, rather, “designed” for “normal” conditions—our bodily systems would, in effect, “self-destruct.”

Although one's faith that tomorrow will be much like today *usually* serves one well—because tomorrow typically *is* much like today, thereby not placing undue stress on our bodily systems—this fact about our bodily systems represents a *problem*, so far as global warming is concerned.

The reason: Global warming—with its various “dimensions”—is likely to cull most of the world's population within a few decades, if not years. *Symptoms* of what lies ahead—extremes in weather conditions, severe—and mammoth—storms, drought, fires, excessive rain, flooding, etc.—are often in the news. And although one may very *sense* that “something is going on,” unless one has exposed oneself to some of the (competent) literature on global warming, one is

unlikely to be able to “connect the dots”—i.e., connect those unusual events to global warming—a process of change likely to *accelerate* within a matter of decades.

A large part of the problem here, of course, is that those in our society “charged” with providing us with important, relevant information—i.e., journalists (including reporters of weather conditions!)—are failing to do so. The reason for that failure may, of course, be restrictions placed on them by their employers. But if a journalist (a) is knowledgeable about the problem of global warming (a rather small number of journalists, I suspect!), and (b) is in a situation where restrictions are in place preventing the individual to convey important and relevant information to others, that person is engaging in *unethical behavior*, and should be ashamed of that fact. (I suspect that the employers of journalists *deliberately* hire people lacking in much intelligence and education—individuals who, therefore, would not recognize an ethical dilemma if it *bit* them!)

Even if journalists *were* able to report truthfully about the likely “progress” of global warming, and the likely *effects* of that “progress,” most of the *consumers* of journalistic reports would likely let this information “go in one ear and out the other.” Why? Because the “faith virus” that infects them causes them to resist claims that we are entering a new phase of human existence—a period during which change will be both rapid and devastating, with a drastic reduction of the human population, perhaps to the point of extinction.

Around 70,000 years ago the [Toba volcanic eruption](#) caused utter devastation, with our species reduced to around 2,000 members, some believe. Such a reduction of the world’s population is difficult for us to grasp, so used to “normal” conditions have we become. If such an eruption were to occur today, it would have the same effect—or *even worse*, given the interdependence that characterizes modern societies—because whatever warning signs occurred *prior* to the eruption would be insufficient to give us time to *prepare* for it, there not even being the *possibility* of preparing for it, of course!

Today is somewhat different, however, in that catastrophic change is unlikely to occur in 2014, but may very well *begin* to occur between now and 2034—i.e., 20 years “down the road.” Those possessing this knowledge, and who take it seriously, should, then, begin to *think* about how they might survive the drastic changes that will be occurring soon, and then *act* on the ideas that they develop. Spending one’s time trying to *stop*, or even *reduce* sharply, greenhouse gases would be a waste of precious time, as would be trying to convince others of the reality of global warming.

The only sensible course of action to pursue today is that of trying to “save” oneself, members of one’s family, and one’s friends. It’s true that *trying* to engage in salvific activities may not *result* in “salvation,” but *not* to try is to betray the promise of one’s species!

[Sent to DV site on 5/1/2014.]

Celebrating May Day, Law Day, Loyalty Day, or Whatever

Alton C. Thompson

“**May Day** on May 1 is an ancient [Northern Hemisphere spring festival](#) and usually a [public holiday](#),^[1] it is also a traditional spring holiday in many cultures. May Day coincides with [International Workers' Day](#), and in many countries that celebrate the latter, it may be referred to as "May Day". So says the [Wikipedia web site](#). (On the IWW see [this book](#).)

As a child, what May Day involved for us kids was the “giving of ‘May baskets’, small baskets of sweets and/or flowers, usually left anonymously on neighbors’ doorsteps.”^[4] The fact that *my* children were never involved in that practice would seem to indicate that the practice may have died out completely in this society.

We children were not aware of the fact that the celebration of May 1 has a long history, and that in the United States its celebration goes back to a commemoration of the [Haymarket Massacre](#) of 1886 in Chicago. The “massacre” referred to here occurred in the

aftermath of a bombing that took place at a labor demonstration on Tuesday May 4, 1886, at Haymarket Square^[2] in [Chicago](#). It began as a peaceful rally in support of workers [striking](#) for an eight-hour day and in reaction to the killing of several workers by the police, the previous day. An unknown person threw a dynamite bomb at [police](#) as they acted to disperse the public meeting. The bomb blast and ensuing gunfire resulted in the deaths of seven police officers and at least four civilians; scores of others were wounded.

“The Haymarket affair is generally considered significant as the origin of international [May Day](#) observances for workers.^{[7][8]} The site of the incident was designated a [Chicago Landmark](#) in 1992,^[9] and a public sculpture was dedicated there in 2004. In addition, the [Haymarket Martyrs' Monument](#) at the defendants' burial site in nearby Forest Park was designated a [National Historic Landmark](#) in 1997.^[10]” For members of the working class, then, what May Day has meant to many until fairly recently is a commemoration, not of the killing that occurred in 1896, but the efforts of workers to improve their living standards.

The mid 1940s—i.e., the period following World War II—was the beginning of the end for the celebration of May 1 as International Workers Day. The reason for this may lie, first, in the fact that several anarchists were held responsible for the 1896 bombing:

In the internationally publicized legal proceedings that followed, eight [anarchists](#) were convicted of [conspiracy](#). The evidence was that one of the defendants may have built the bomb, but none of those on trial had thrown it.^{[3][4][5][6]} Seven were sentenced to death and one to a term of 15

years in prison. The death sentences of two of the defendants were [commuted](#) by Illinois governor [Richard J. Oglesby](#) to terms of life in prison, and another committed suicide in jail rather than face the gallows. The other four were hanged on November 11, 1887. In 1893, Illinois' new governor [John Peter Altgeld](#) pardoned the remaining defendants and criticized the trial.

Second, although here in [Milwaukee Socialists](#) (often referred to as “sewer socialists”—a term coined by [Morris Hillquit](#)) dominated the local government, beginning in the late 1890s, until [Frank P. Zeidler](#)'s mayoral term ended in 1960, the fact that relationships between the United States and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate after World War II—because of the Soviet Union's “communism”—had repercussions within our society: The anarchists of the 1896 bombing incident became equated with Soviet communists, and worker parties/organizations *per se* became suspect. And the fact that Wisconsin's jackass (I would like to use stronger language, but . . .) Senator [Joseph McCarthy](#) began a campaign of “Red baiting” did not help matters.

As a consequence, “[nationalist](#) propaganda holidays were established in its place [i.e., in place of International Workers Day], such as [Loyalty Day](#) and [Law Day](#) in 1958.¹⁷” Fortunately, the celebration of neither of those two days has gained any “traction” in this country, and for most people in this country now May Day is just another day—but for those in the working class in this country, this means that they no longer have a day of their own for celebration purposes. True, there is still Labor Day in September. But to [add “insult to injury,”](#) [House Majority Leader] Eric Cantor famously [declared](#) [two years ago], without shame, that “Labor Day was actually a day to celebrate owners and managers”! All I have to say to that is “Jeeez!”

Perhaps at one time the United States was a country “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” as Republican Abraham Lincoln famously said in his 1863 [Gettysburg Address](#). But the United States is now a country of, by, and for the rich—and is destined to remain so. There are only two ways out that I can see:

- Recognize the likelihood that our society will collapse within a few decades, if not years because of global warming, start engaging in pre-adaptive activities, and then just wait for the society to collapse—resulting in the deaths of all members of the elite, but of many innocents as well, of course.
- Use May Day of 2015 as a day of mass suicides³ by members of the working class and any others who are “sick and tired” of the direction in which our society is headed—which would result in societal collapse next year, saving us from a *future* societal collapse.

³ The [Church of Euthanasia](#) has as its motto: “Save the Planet, Kill Yourself.” It should be obvious that one will not “save the planet” if one accomplishes suicide; what's far more likely is that as global warming continues to “progress,” it will become increasingly difficult to live, so that more and more people will choose to accomplish suicide rather than succumb to starvation of the ravages of disease.

My choice is for the first option, but the second one sure is tempting! At any rate, when I send this essay in for posting, I will be copying the [Milwaukee Area Labor Council of the AFL-CIO \(robin@milwaukeeelabor.org\)](#) for their consideration.

So far as “pre-adaptive” activities are concerned, my “dream” has, for a number of years now, been to found an institute—the [Sveiningen](#) Institute⁴—that would have the purpose of fostering the development of cooperative eco-communities. Pursuant to that dream, I have sent an email to an organization with which billionaire [Doug Tompkins](#) is associated, hoping that might be interested in funding such an institute, the basis for such a hope being that he has been associated with [Paul Kingsnorth](#).

⁴ I have been told (but have not been able to substantiate) that when my great grandfather—Tjøstolv Torjesen—came to the United States (Chicago, specifically) in 1848, from the [Tvedestrand](#) area of Norway, the farm that he had been living on in Norway had the name “Sveiningen,” and was a part of the Solberg farm. I have also been told that when the rest of the family came over in 1853, the name on the passport of his father, TorjeTjøstolvsen, was given as “Solberg”—which would seem to indicate that he was the owner of the Solberg farm in the Tvedestrand area at that time.

What makes that believable is that Torje is reputed to have paid for the passage of 60 people in addition to the members of his family! In [this piece](#) we find the following: “the prosperous Torje Kjøstelsen Sveningen from Holt near Tvedestrand”—in which the surname is given as “Sveningen” (without the first “l”)—and it is stated that Torje was an “influential man with lots of friends . . .” The claim here that he was “prosperous” adds credence to the claim that he paid for the passage of 60 people in addition to the members of his family (*who* they were, and where they *went* being unknown to me)—and makes one proud to have been his descendant!

EPA and CNN: They *Deserve* One Another!

Alton C. Thompson

Elizabeth Landau, of the Cable News Network (CNN), begins a recent article with the [statement that](#): “Climate change isn’t something in the far-off future: It’s a potentially disastrous reality that's already starting to have effects that are expected to worsen, experts say.”

Not wanting to merely *report* this fact, but offer some useful advice on how to *deal* with it, she then went on to offer five suggestions:

1. Become informed

For: “The most powerful way that the average person can combat climate change is to become informed about it, says [J. Marshall Shepherd](#), former president of the American Meteorological Society and professor at the University of Georgia.

2. Make changes at home

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has listed a number of measures you might take to reduce “your greenhouse gas emissions, which would also save you money,” including the following:

- Seal and insulate your home;
- Make use of recycling programs, and compost food and yard waste;
- Reduce water waste;

3. Be greener at the office

The EPA has also made recommendations for the office, such as:

- Set computers and other office equipment to power down during periods when you're not using them;
- Use Energy Star equipment;
- Recycle and reuse whenever possible;

4. Reduce emissions in transit

Again, the EPA has recommendations:

- Rely on public transportation, biking, walking, carpooling or telecommuting instead of driving;
- While driving, try not to do hard accelerations, don't spend more than 30 seconds idling, and go easy on the gas pedal and brakes;
- Make sure to regularly check your tire pressure.

5. **Get involved and educate others about the big picture**

After all, “Your green strategies in your daily life can have a small impact, but the whole planet has to be on board for dealing with climate change in order to instigate global effects.”

Given CNN’s [history of controversies](#), I’m not surprised that Ms. Landau would look to the EPA as a fount of “[goodness and light](#).” After all, the pronouncements of the EPA are so “in tune” with those of, e.g., Guy McPherson.

Please forgive me for making such a ludicrous comment! If the EPA is the fount of *anything*, it is *conventional thinking*. Ms. Landau is correct in stating that global warming is “a potentially disastrous reality that’s already starting to have effects that are expected to worsen.” In fact, if anything, stronger words are needed to express the threat that we face, such as Guy McPherson’s assertion in the Introduction of his [Going Dark](#) (2013):

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

Now if Prof. McPherson is right about our future, then the recommendations of the EPA, if taken seriously (as Ms Landau evidently does), will give one a false sense of security—and I fail to understand how *that* can be a “good thing.”

But *is* he right? In the sense that we cannot know the future with certainty, his claim about the future is open to question. But McPherson not only makes the above claim, but provides evidence in *support* of that claim—evidence that would be difficult to refute. Granted that the evidence he provides is *itself* open to question, in that it omits reference to possible developments in the future that could render parts of his evidence irrelevant. But such developments *cannot* be known in advance, leaving one with two choices:

- Assume that that evidence will *remain* valid into the foreseeable future.
- Assume that there will be developments that will *nullify*, to an important extent, at least *some* of that evidence.

I am not a gambler; e.g., I never buy lottery tickets in the hope that I will win millions of dollars. But one cannot *avoid* being a gambler about the future—although many in our society are ill-informed about global warming (in large part because of the “wonderful” mass media we have in this country), and as a consequence “operate” under the assumption that tomorrow will be much like today, the day after tomorrow . . . , etc. So that they are gambling without being aware of that fact.

Those of us who *are* aware of the threat, however, *are* faced with the above two choices, and are tempted to accept the second choice. That is, we are tempted to engage in “wishful thinking” regarding possible developments in the future, because that enables us *avoid* facing the very real possibility that as food becomes increasingly difficult to produce, and the prices of food products begin to rise, more and more of one’s budget will need to go to buying food, which will mean that our purchases of other products will decline, which will force the producers of those products to lay off employees, which will force *other* producers to lay off employees . . . the eventual result being the collapse of our *economic* system, and thus *societal* collapse.

We live in a society wherein individualistic thinking is prized, so that few can look beyond the latest [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#), and perceive its *implications*. But the fact that we not only tend to *ignore* the findings of that report, but fail to think about its implications for us as *individuals* and for our *society*, will not change what actually *occurs* in the future. Again, we cannot know for *certain* how the future will “look” in 2030 CE, 2040 CE, etc., but McPherson’s projection that it will *not* be “rosy” is a better bet than that it *will* be.

If one *accepts* McPherson’s view, what one *does* with that “information” is up to each and every one of us—and ideally different people will take it in different directions. Not *ideally*, though, but *actually*, for we are all *different* in various respects—which is a *good* thing. For one or more individuals doing so may “hit” on ideas that, in being implemented, will allow our species to survive.

The [eruption of Mt. Toba](#) around 70,000 years ago wiped out most of our ancestors—perhaps to around a mere 2,000 individuals!—and human activity had nothing to do with that mass extinction event. The extinction event that we are currently in (the [Sixth Extinction](#))—*as* a result of human activities (the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation)—may or may not bring about our extinction, but is *certain* to reduce the world’s population substantially.

We need to “wake up” to this possibility—no, *probability*!—and then decide how to respond to it, each in our own way. Just don’t look to CNN for answers!

But is Neo-Populism the Answer?

Alton C. Thompson

Robert Reich made the [interesting observation](#) recently that some coalescing of the right and left is occurring in our country in that populism is growing on both sides. He noted: “While still far apart, neo-populists on both sides are bending toward one another and against the establishment.” Reich went on to assert that “Populists on the right and left are also coming together around six principles.”

- 1. Cut the biggest Wall Street banks down to a size where they’re no longer too big to fail.**
- 2. Resurrect the Glass-Steagall Act**
- 3. End corporate welfare**
- 4. Stop the National Security Agency from spying on Americans**
- 5. Scale back American interventions overseas**
- 6. Oppose trade agreements crafted by big corporations.**

I am in full agreement with all six of these principles. I have one major problem with the principles, however: They show no recognition whatsoever that our “ship of state” is headed for a collision with a strange sort of “iceberg,” global warming. In terms of *priorities* at the moment, first place should be given to *that* fact, given that it will be meaningless to achieve these objectives if we are all dead!

About 70,000 years ago the [eruption of Mt. Toba](#) “caused a global [volcanic winter](#) of 6–10 years and possibly a 1,000-year-long cooling episode.” Its “erupted mass was 100 times greater than that of the largest volcanic eruption in recent history, the 1815 eruption of [Mount Tambora](#) in Indonesia, which caused the 1816 “[Year Without a Summer](#)” in the northern hemisphere.”

The article continues: “in sub-Saharan Africa human populations dropped to as low as 2,000 individuals for perhaps as long as 100,000 years, before numbers began to increase in the [Late Stone Age](#). Limitations of single locus studies include the large randomness of the fixation process, and studies that take this randomness into account have estimated the effective human population size at 11,000–12,000 individuals.”

In short, our species was nearly rendered extinct 70,000 years ago, by natural causes, and today we face a similar crisis caused by our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation activities, with the

current crisis also caused by “natural” causes—but with human activities having *precipitated* those “natural” causes. Although many scientists today have a degree of optimism regarding the human future—if, that is, we begin *immediately* to address the problem—other scientists are less sanguine, Prof. Guy McPherson, e.g., stating in the Introduction of his [Going Dark](#) (2013):

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

Granted that this is an extreme view; but if one reads McPherson’s argument in support of that assertion, one will have difficulty *refuting* it.

What McPherson’s assertion seemingly suggests is that there is no point in trying to prevent the inevitable, so one might just as well “eat, drink, and be merry” (or “enjoy life,” as [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#) has it). However, as the crest that I have “borrowed” from some place on the internet states, “As long as I breathe, I have hope.”



As humans, creatures [given the charge](#) to “Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground,” we have an obligation that extends beyond our own species. Therefore, we must do what we can—each person using whatever abilities s/he has been given and has acquired—to do what we can to “save” as much life as possible.

At present, the situation may seem hopeless. But by *not* simply “giving up” we may surprise ourselves in what we are able to accomplish.

Let us, then, get to work! What is so discouraging about our chances for accomplishing much, however, is that obviously intelligent individuals such as Robert Reich seemingly don’t seem to have “clue” as to the seriousness of the present.

[Sent to Dissident Voice site on 5/8/2014.]

[Welcoming Societal Collapse](#)

Alton C. Thompson

[Chris Hedges](#), a columnist for the [Truthdig web site](#), recently [wrote](#) the following regarding the dismissal of a lawsuit (*Hedges v. Obama*) that he had brought:

The U.S. Supreme Court decision to refuse to hear our case concerning Section 1021(b)(2) of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which permits the military to seize U.S. citizens and hold them indefinitely in military detention centers without due process, means that this provision will continue to be law. It means the nation has entered a post-constitutional era. It means that extraordinary rendition of U.S. citizens on U.S. soil by our government is legal. It means that the courts, like the legislative and executive branches of government, exclusively serve corporate power—one of the core definitions of fascism. It means that the internal mechanisms of state are so corrupted and subservient to corporate power that there is no hope of reform or protection for citizens under our most basic constitutional rights. It means that the consent of the governed—a poll by OpenCongress.com showed that this provision had a 98 percent disapproval rating—is a cruel joke. And it means that if we do not rapidly build militant mass movements to overthrow corporate tyranny, including breaking the back of the two-party duopoly that is the mask of corporate power, we will lose our liberty.

Hedges is right to declare that the United States is becoming (what [John Stanton](#) has recently called) a “sinkhole”—although “cesspool” might be a more appropriate term! But is building “militant mass movements to overthrow corporate tyranny” the answer to this problem?

Hedges’s suggestion raises at least three questions:

1. *Will* such “movements” come into existence?
2. If they do, will they be *successful* in “turning things around”?
3. Even if they *are* successful, will this occur *before* our society collapses—either for *purely economic* reasons, or because global warming is the *direct* culprit, with our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation activities being the *ultimate* reason?

I have no doubt that the answer to the first question is that some mass movements will emerge. But if, in coming into existence, their focus is solely on “regaining our liberty,” they are doomed to fail—because global warming will “catch up” to them. That is, the societal changes that global warming will be precipitating will, at some point, extinguish such movements—by *culling* the members of those movements along with many others.

One of the few scientists to recognize the severity of the threat posed by global warming is [Guy McPherson](#), who concluded (see, e.g., his [Going Dark](#), 2013), as the new millennium was

dawning, that our species is destined for extinction. This was not a “wild guess” on his part, but a prediction based on evidence difficult to refute.

Given my motto, “As long as I breathe, I have hope,” I refuse to believe that our species is doomed—even though I’m convinced that British scientist [Kevin Anderson](#) is right in declaring that global warming is likely to wipe out [90% of the human population](#) if the global mean temperature reaches 4° C (which is likely).

Based on that belief, rather than try to “fix” the Existing Order, what one should do is (a) recognize the insanity of such efforts (given their likely utter futility), (b) recognize the inevitability of societal system collapse here and elsewhere (with a consequent horrendous loss of life), and (c) *embrace* that very real possibility.

Such a suggestion might very well strike one as extraordinarily *evil*, but given the virtual inevitability of societal system collapse, on a worldwide scale, and one’s recognition of this possibility, one is faced with but two choices:

1. *Resign* oneself to it, and either try to enjoy oneself while one is still alive, or decide to simply “end it all” by suiciding.
2. *Embrace* the high probability of societal collapse (with consequent severe culling) occurring, and begin focusing on what one should be doing to enhance the chances that one will not be among those culled.

Making the second choice makes much more sense to me than making the first one; in fact, how can one claim to be a *human being* and opt for the first choice?!

As to *what* one should do, that is something that each one making the second choice will need to decide for himself or herself, and some form of “[environmental adoption](#)” (a term introduced by [Armen A. Alchian](#)) will ensure (one hopes!) that at least *some* of those decisions turn out to have “survival value.”

[Sent to BNW site on 5/9/2014.]

My First Birthday

Alton C. Thompson

To celebrate my first birthday, on January 6, 1941, President of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his [State of the Union address](#) (commonly known as [Four Freedoms speech](#)), in which he proposed four fundamental freedoms that people “everywhere in the world” ought to enjoy:

1. [Freedom of speech](#)
2. [Freedom of worship](#)
3. [Freedom from want](#)
4. [Freedom from fear](#)

In actuality, Pres. Roosevelt didn’t *know* it was my birthday; in fact, he didn’t even know of my *existence*—which made us *even*, as *I* was too young to know of *his* existence! But those are mere technicalities. The point is that he proposed four “bedrock” principles that, if they had been implemented, would have resulted in a world vastly different from what it is in 2014.

What’s interesting about Roosevelt’s list is that it consists of two *positive* principles and two *negative* ones, with the positive ones being listed first. Evidently he was concerned with having a list that displayed “balance,” and wanted to give equal weight to the positive and the negative—unlike another famous list—the “[Ten Commandments](#)”—which consists of *two* positive commands and *eight* of the other kind!

Perhaps the growing complexity of society accounts for this disparity—the possibility that in a relatively “simple” society it is injunctions of a *negative* sort that are primarily needed, whereas a relatively “complex” society has need for relatively more *positive* injunctions.

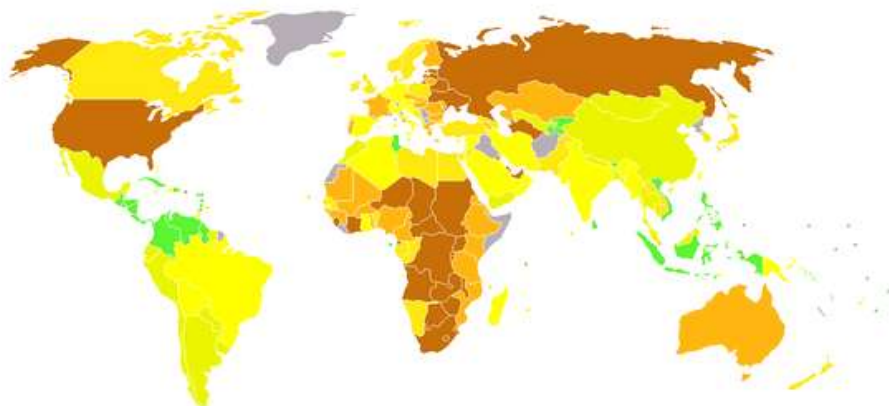
I don’t know if Pres. Roosevelt was *serious* about these four principles—their lack of implementation making one suspect that he *wasn’t*. But, of course, how much can one expect from “[one solitary life](#)” (which does not apply to *Roosevelt*, of course—the “solitary” part, that is)? Still, the President of the United States has a great deal of power at his disposal—power that can be used in an effort to promote implementation of, e.g., the “Four Freedoms” or, rather, imperialistic ventures abroad and favors for rich individuals/corporations at home. Needless to say, the latter has had more appeal for our presidents than the former—during my lifetime, at

least—so that the United States has become at most a “sinkhole (as [John Stanton](#) has labeled it), or, more realistically, a [cesspool](#).

That the United States is becoming a cesspool is indicated by the following [rankings](#) relative to other countries:

Name	World Rank
Children’s Index	30
Gender Gap	31
Life expectancy	49
Environmental Performance Index	61
Global Peace Index	85
Happy Planet Index	114

The Index that I find of particular interest here is the “[Happy Planet Index](#),” on which our country ranks a dismal 114 out of 143 (using data from 2006). As the following map indicates,



Map showing countries shaded by their position in the Happy Planet Index (2006). The highest-ranked countries are bright green; the lowest are brown.

the United States shares much in common with many African countries!

Such a low ranking should embarrass any citizen of the United States—but, of course, although many in our country *sense* that they are not living in Heaven, few are aware of this

Index (it’s safe to assume), so that they lack *evidence* to support what they sense.

More importantly, however, few in our country (and in *other* countries as well, I suspect) are aware of the fact that what they are sensing is not *ill-being* so much, as *death*. People can increasingly sense that Nature is not “behaving” as it “should,” and are learning about [reports](#) that paint a rather dismal future. Given that they can also sense that our “leaders” do not seem to

be overly concerned with the threat posed by global warming—with some of us knowing that the “fine talk” of “leaders” such as Barracks O’Bomber are not matched with meaningful actions—a feeling of unease is becoming increasingly pervasive.

Pres. James (“Jimmy”) Carter had dared to use the word “malaise” in a [1979 speech](#), and—surprisingly—his “poll numbers shot up 11% in the wake of the speech, something that rarely happened during his presidency.” Carter’s gain in popularity did not last long, though, for “soon after giving it [i.e., the speech], Carter fired his Cabinet, which threw the country into a tizzy, suggesting governmental meltdown. The president’s poll numbers sunk again, as confusion and disarray took over.”

And there is this interesting tidbit, of which I was not aware at the time (because I was not a viewer of the television program in question):

When the citizens of Springfield unveil a statute of Jimmy Carter on episode 80 of [The Simpsons](#), the statue is emblazoned with the words ‘Malaise Forever.’ Not only that, the citizens tear the statue down and riot.

[Link added.]

Although this is a time in our history when truth-telling by our President would be welcomed by many—but would be followed by excoriation by the rich and rich corporations—those *latter* facts guarantee that truth-telling will not occur. Or if it *does* occur, it will likely be in some *muted* form—and will not get *acted upon* by the President and Congress.

What *that* means is that if one is *aware* of what the future likely has in store for us humans, one will dismiss out of hand the likelihood of significant actions to address this matter by our “leaders,” and will, instead, “take matters into one’s own hands”—and act, perhaps in conjunction with others, to “save” oneself.

When my birthday rolls around next year, I hope that there will be tangible evidence of this occurring.

[Sent to DV site on 5/13/2014.]

Greenpeace's Folly?

Alton C. Thompson

Greenpeace recently released a [report](#) that [details](#) “how by 2050, renewable energy sources could be producing close to 97% of electricity in the U.S. and approximately 94% of the country's needs for heating and cooling homes and businesses.” The report “presents the case for a radical and rapid energy transformation and a pathway for meeting the reduced emissions that the scientific community says is urgent.”

The “plan” would lead “to about 1.5 million energy-related jobs in 2030,” contribute to energy independence, and would enable citizens to gain more control over energy production.

To make this energy “[r]evolution” possible, it would be necessary for local, state, and the national government to implement the following policies:

1. Abolish all subsidies, including any policies which confer a financial benefit, to fossil fuels and nuclear energy. The End Polluter Welfare Act, introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) is an example of federal action that must move forward.
2. Internalize the currently socialized cost of industrial climate pollution, such as with a federal carbon fee.
3. Mandate strict efficiency standards for all energy consuming appliances, buildings and vehicles.
4. Establish legally binding targets for renewable energy and combined heat and power generation.
5. Reform electricity markets by guaranteeing priority access to the grid for renewable power generators.
6. Provide defined and stable returns for investors, for example by feed-in tariff schemes.
7. Implement better labeling and disclosure mechanisms to provide more environmental product information.
8. Increase research and development budgets for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

This “plan” has just two problems—but they are serious ones:

1. The likelihood of this “plan” being implemented within the next, say, 10 – 15 years is zero. Put another way, the “plan” utterly lacks in *political* realism.

2. Even if the “plan” *were* implemented, it would likely not prevent catastrophe from occurring.

The basis for my asserting the latter is this statement by [Guy McPherson](#), in an email he sent to me on March 20, 2014:

This notion that 2 C is the danger point is ludicrous. Even James Hansen recently said 1 C should be avoided, thus agreeing with the United Nations Advisory Group on Greenhouse Gases (1990): “Beyond 1 degree C may elicit rapid, unpredictable and non-linear responses that could lead to extensive ecosystem damage.”

I'd say it's too late already. According to Clive Hamilton's April 2013 book, *Earthmasters*, even collapse of industrial civilization adds 1.1 C (thus taking us to 1.95 C). And we've triggered numerous self-reinforcing feedback loops, as I describe in this essay:

<http://guymcpherson.com/2013/01/climate-change-summary-and-update/>

Let me first clarify two points in the above statement that might be confusing to some:

1. McPherson's reference to “2 C” is to the “[tipping point](#)” that has been the consensus with climate scientists—i.e., the point after which change begins to accelerate, with there being no possibility of reversing the trend.
2. The reference to “1.95 C” is the addition of Clive Hamilton's 1.1 C and 0.85 C—the amount that the global mean temperature has increased since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.
3. In referring to “numerous self-reinforcing feedback loops,” McPherson means that global warming is a process that feeds on itself. Put another way—a highly ironic one!—global warming is a process that tends to “snowball”:
 - As warming proceeds, more and more snow and ice melt, exposing more and more bare ground. As bare ground has a lower [albedo](#) than do snow and ice (which tend to *reflect*, rather than *absorb*, the short-wave energy coming from the sun), it tends to *absorb* the sun's rays, and convert that energy into long-wave energy, which acts to further heat the lower atmosphere.
 - As warming proceeds, the permafrost that covers vast areas in the northern hemisphere tends to thaw, in the process releasing [methane gas](#), which is far more potent as a greenhouse gas than is carbon dioxide (CO₂). Heating is thereby *accelerated*.

- Carbon “sinks” such as the oceans are becoming saturated, so that for that reason alone more of the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere will *stay* there for a long period, and “do their thing” (i.e., contribute to *further* heating).
- [Forests serve as a carbon “sinks,”](#) but because increased variability in weather conditions is a feature of global warming, and severe *droughts* will become increasingly common, *forest fires* will also become increasingly common—and become an [increasingly important source of atmospheric carbon](#), thereby “contributing” further to the acceleration process.

Now if my second point above—“Even if the “plan” *were* implemented, it would likely not prevent catastrophe from occurring”—is true, the question that arises is: Why are you folks misleading the public to the effect that “reforms” (a) *can* occur, and that (b) their occurrence would prevent catastrophe from occurring?

Granted that because the future is the “not yet,” we cannot know with certainty what the atmospheric situation will be in 2030, 2040, 2050 CE, etc. However, given that physical laws are involved here and that the fossil fuel interests can be expected to continue their stranglehold on our political leaders, the most reasonable guess about the future is that catastrophe is likely.

That *might* mean that our species will be “wiped out,” but this cannot be known with certainty. Given that, it is irresponsible to lull people into a sense that “things will get fixed.” It is only responsible, rather, to advise people to *plan* on catastrophe, and begin engaging in activities of a pre-adaptive nature *anticipating* catastrophe—while hoping that the activities one engages in enable one to survive.

Appendix

On May 13, 2014, I sent the following email to Clive Hamilton:

Prof. Hamilton,

In an email that I received from Guy McPherson in March, he referred to your *Earthmasters* book, and said that you had written therein that the collapse of industrial society would involve an increase in the global mean of 1.1 C.

Assuming that Guy is right about this, it doesn’t seem to me that you were referring to the concept of “[climate commitment](#)”—the likelihood that the global mean would increase from 1.0 to 1.5 (or 1.6, some would say), even if we would stop pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere tomorrow.

Given that the global mean has increased by about 0.85 C so far, the “built in” increase added to the increase that has already occurred would give a total increase of from 1.85 to 2.35 (or 2.45)

C. Thus, if the “tipping point” is as high as 2.0 C (MIT’s Kerry Emanuel has stated that going above 1.0 C would be dangerous), it is virtually inevitable that that point will be reached and crossed, leading to disaster (Guy would say our inevitable extinction).

Could you please inform me as to what your “1.1” is referring to?

In opening my email on May 14, I found that I have received the following message from Clive:

Dear Al

I have no idea where Guy McPherson got that from. It's certainly not in my book. In *Requiem for a Species* I argued that even under optimistic assumptions about the speed of global action to cut emissions we are heading for 4C plus of warming.

Clive Hamilton
Professor of Public Ethics
Charles Sturt University
www.clivehamilton.com

I find this embarrassing, to say the least! Here I have been trusting Guy to supply me with accurate information—not only in his articles, but in his emails as well, and he has let me down. What I would like to think is that he had derived the “1.1” information from some other source, and had forgotten what it was. I could forward the email from Clive to Guy and ask for an explanation, but don’t want to embarrass Guy—and make him angry with me besides!

Here is what Guy says at [this location](#): “Earth-system scientist Clive Hamilton concludes in his April 2013 book *Earthmasters* that “without [atmospheric sulphates associated with industrial activity] ... Earth would be an extra 1.1 C warmer.” In other words, collapse takes us directly to 2 C within a matter of weeks.” **On the basis of *this* quote (for I assume that it is that!), it would seem that Clive doesn’t remember what he wrote! On the other hand, given that I *have not read* Clive’s book, I can’t say that with certainty.]**

Later in the day I sent this to Clive, and hope that he responds:

Dr. Hamilton,

Here is a quotation from Guy McPherson’s “Climate Change Summary”:

Earth-system scientist Clive Hamilton concludes in his April 2013 book *Earthmasters* that “without [atmospheric sulphates associated with industrial activity] ... Earth would be an extra 1.1 C warmer.” In other words, collapse takes us directly to 2 C within a matter of weeks.

He does not cite the page number on which this supposed statement of yours appears, so your denial that you had said this makes me wonder what his source of information might have been!

Al Thompson

On Thursday, May 15, 2014, I received this response from Clive:

The “extra 1.1 degrees” is from me. The conclusion drawn from it is not.

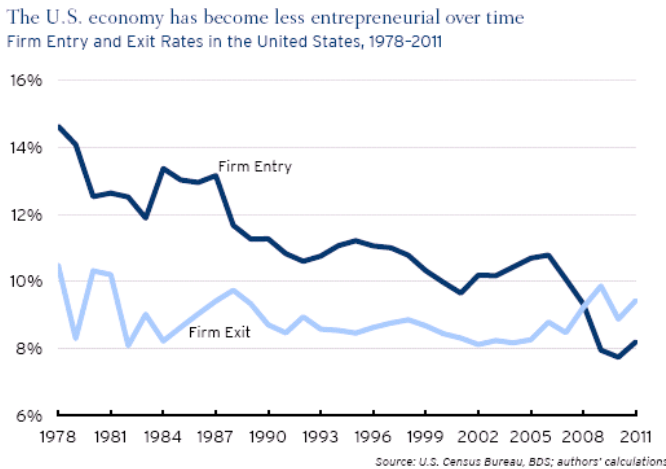
I’m not sure *what* conclusion Clive draws. Apparently, however, what he questions is “a matter of weeks”—and believes that it would take longer to reach 2 C. The amount of change that has occurred so far is 0.85, which added to 1.1 = 1.95 C—not quite 2 C. But what Clive’s referring to is something different than “climate commitment,” so one would think that that would need to be added in as well. Thus, it seems that when global warming causes societal collapse, the global mean will increase (a) for the reason specified by Clive, as (b) a result of “climate commitment,” and (c) the positive feedback mechanisms set in motion. I suspect that societal collapse will not occur until *after* 2 C is reached, in the early stages of change acceleration. The only question, then, is when conditions will be so intolerable, worldwide, that our species will become extinct.

[Sent to Guy's site on 5/14/2014.]

So It's *Entrepreneurialism* That We Need?

Alton C. Thompson

The Brookings Institute has just [published a report](#) in which the following figure appears:



In commenting on the figure, the authors stated that “the firm entry rate—or firms less than one year old as a share of all firms—fell by nearly half in the thirty-plus years between 1978 and 2011.” They added: “The precipitous drop since 2006 is both noteworthy and disturbing.”

The [Daily Take Team](#), in offering an explanation for this trend, has given [the following](#) as the reasons:

1. The election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States, for he “stopped enforcing the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1982, and handed out massive and unfair tax breaks to large corporations and their executives and stockholders, all at the expense of the small businesses that had built the American economy.
2. “For the past 30+ years, healthcare costs have been through the roof. Between 1980 and 2005, spending on healthcare as a percentage of GDP [nearly doubled](#).” They go on to note that “[A study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research](#) found that the U.S. has one of the smallest small business sectors of the 22 industrialized nations it studied, and the study's authors pointed to high healthcare costs as one of the main reasons why.”
3. “Right now, more than 40 million Americans hold student loan debt, with the average loan debt being around \$23,000. Over the past decade, the average debt for a 25-year-old has risen a staggering 91 percent, and most of that debt is from student loans. And that's bad news for entrepreneurship, because [according to the Y Combinator](#), one of America's top business accelerators, the average age of entrepreneurs is 26.”

Their analysis of this trend with entrepreneurship leads the author to conclude: “It's time to reverse this trend, and for entrepreneurship to thrive again in America.

Perhaps in *normal* times this would be a conclusion with merit. But in the light of this statement by John Davies on the [Arctic-News Blogspot](#),

The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.

it appears that members of the Daily Take Team—like so many in our society, and world, in fact—are living in a *cocoon*, blithely unaware of the fact that (a) global warming is occurring, is (b) likely to accelerate soon as positive feedback mechanisms “kick in,” so that (c) the “[mass extinction](#)” event now occurring may very well include us soon: John Davies is not the only climate scientist predicting the imminent demise of our species.

We seem to be living in a world in which small groups of people each live in their own special world, and are oblivious to what is occurring outside that small world. What’s so surprising about this phenomenon is that our ability to communicate quickly with people all over the world has never been greater. I guess that the explanation of this phenomenon is that living in a small world places such strong pressures on one to “keep up” with what’s going on in that world that one simply cannot afford to do one’s best “keeping up”—and thereby failing to learn much about the Larger World.

Granted that the purveyors of “news” in our society tend to be slaves of those who are “paying their way,” with *those* individuals/firms having as their primary interest the selling of products and services. But with the tremendous growth of internet sites in recent years, there are now numerous “alternate” sources of information, with some of them providing accurate information about the threat posed to our (and many other!) species by global warming. Thus, those living in small worlds—given that they do have at least *some* leisure time—really have no excuse for being ignorant about this matter.

We are living in a time when this (evidently) massive ignorance about global warming is not only inexcusable, but is a major reason why our species is inexorably headed toward oblivion. Would that this were not so—given that I have 5 grandchildren for whom I know that there will *be* no future—but I have no magic wand to change things.

[Sent to Guy on 5/27/2014]

Abandoning Wishful Thinking, and Reasoning Our Way to (Possible) “Salvation”

Alton C. Thompson

On Saturday, May 17, 2014, I attended a viewing of [James Balog](#)’s documentary *[Chasing Ice](#)* at the Central United Methodist Church in central Milwaukee, and on the following day attended the “Climate Stewardship: Sustainability, Eco-Justice and Well-Being” conference at that church sponsored by the [Wisconsin Interfaith Power & Light \(WIPL\)](#) organization.

A number of environmental organizations had materials on display on Sunday, and individuals from a number of different religions were represented: Christian ([Methodist](#), [Presbyterian](#), [Lutheran](#), [Baptist](#), and [Roman Catholic](#)), [Jewish](#), Native American ([Osage](#)), [Islamic](#), and [Sikh](#). The featured speaker was [Calvin B. DeWitt](#), Professor Emeritus of Environmental Studies at the [Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies](#) (named for former Wisconsin U. S. Senator [Gaylord A. Nelson](#)) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Those attending the showing of the documentary and the conference on Sunday seemed to be decent, intelligent, well-educated, and well-meaning people, and for that reason I am somewhat reluctant to be critical of the individuals and organizations involved with the presentations those two days. In fact, I almost feel guilty doing so. But my perspective on global warming is somewhat different from any of the individuals/organizations present, and I feel compelled to express it here.

The Saturday group was a very small group—only eight people in attendance—and after the showing of the documentary, a spokesman for the local [350.org](#) chapter led a short discussion session. A part of that organization’s display was a poster that said something to the effect that “350 is the most important number there is.” [1] After several individuals had made comments, I made a comment on the poster, and asked, rhetorically: “When will we see 350 ppm again, given that 400 ppm was recorded for the first time in modern history last year, and the prospect is for a continual increase in that number.” I started to comment further on this, but the spokesman for the 350.org organization cut me off—making it clear to me that his organization’s views on global warming were “gospel,” so that he wasn’t interested in hearing any views that were in conflict with those views.

That fact bothered me; as a result, on Sunday night, after mulling over my thoughts for several hours, I hastily wrote out a draft of this essay, and then finalized it several days later.

I should add that after Sunday’s presentation, there were several “workshops,” but I was unable to attend any of them because I had promised a friend of mine who lives in an assisted living

facility, that I would drive him to a Polish Club facility in my part of town for a musical event later that day.

This essay, then, was written in reaction to my experiences during a recent weekend, experiences that I have found disappointing—but which also have made me angry, for reasons that I will reveal later. Let me begin here, however, by noting that I am writing this essay for those who believe (a) *that* global warming is occurring, and (b) is an extremely serious problem—regarding as a waste of time efforts to try to “convert” non-believers.[2] Given the above two assumptions, one, as a “believer,” needs to ask: “What is the proper *response* to this problem?”

In providing an answer to that question, I suggest as advisable—as *safest* [3]—to start with a *worst-case scenario*. As a possibility for this, I suggest [this statement](#) by John Davies from September 20, 2013: “The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.”



John
Davies

(Source of picture on left: <http://arctic-news.blogspot.com/>)

One *could* react to this statement by “[throwing in the towel](#),” arguing that because our extinction is *inevitable*, there is *no point* in trying to do anything to try to “save” ourselves. I am *not* writing for people who make *that* conclusion, however, but, rather, for people who perceive Davies’s statement as a *challenge*—as a “call to action.”

Given this, and the projection that our species will become extinct before 2040 CE, the next question that I would suggest for people who are still with me is this: “Is it *reasonable* to expect that the *governmental* bodies of the world—including ours—will address the problem of global warming (a) in a way and (b) quickly enough that might “falsify” the projection made by Davies—at least to the degree that our *extinction*, as a species, is prevented?”

Granted that the governmental bodies of the world may not, through even their “best efforts,” be able to prevent a *severe culling* of the world’s population from occurring (e.g., 90%—a [figure quoted](#) by British climate scientist [Kevin Anderson](#)). The question at hand, however, is: “Can they be expected at least to engage—and soon—in actions aimed at preventing our *extinction* as humans?”

My “reading” of the world’s governments—and *certainly* including our own!—is that the answer to that question is a decisive NO!

Given *that* answer, the possible actors with which we are left are (a) individuals and (b) *groups* of individuals—the latter including *existing* formal organizations and groups, and groups specially created to address the problem of global warming.

As to *what* these units might do, I have addressed that matter in my [“It’s Later Than You Think,”](#) and so will not repeat myself here. Let me add three points to the presentation in that essay, however:

- Of the phenomena that comprise “global warming,” the most important one may be atmospheric *variability* and, therefore, *unpredictability*. This variability is likely (for one thing) to make food production increasingly difficult and therefore likely to eventuate in [societal system collapse](#) here and elsewhere. Given the high degree of interdependence that exists in today’s societies, societal collapse will mean that unless one can provide for one’s own basic needs (e.g., food and water), one is likely to die from starvation or disease—or even violence (including suicide), as desperate people seeking necessities start killing others to obtain what they need. These eventualities form the fundamental principle upon which my suggestions are based.
- Those who *plan* to respond to global warming, and who then *act* on their plans, are not *guaranteed* survival: *Some* may survive, but *none* may!
- *Some* survivors (if there *are* any!) may be people who hadn’t planned to survive global warming (e.g., global warming may not have been on their “radar”) but do so because they “just happen” to have a way of life, and live at a location, that *enables* them to survive—the [Amish](#) being a possible example.

If [Dante Alighieri](#) were writing his [Inferno](#) in 2014, and given that treachery was associated with his ninth circle, I think that it would be a “toss up” for him deciding whether to put “deniers” in circle nine or, rather, “believers” who give false hope—such as the [“350”](#) folk and Prof. DeWitt!

The 350 folk, and others of their ilk, are undoubtedly *sincere* people, but are people who fail to take global warming as *seriously* as it needs to be. Their basic assumption, held *tacitly* I assume, is that “*lifestyle*” changes [4] and “free time” activities such as writing letters to politicians and engaging in protests are sufficient to “turn things around”—but all that is doing is giving people false hope, by making them more susceptible to being culled by global warming than they would be if they recognized, instead, that only *way-of-life* change [5] will increase one’s chances for survival.

Those who counsel lifestyle change are not treacherous as a matter of *intention*, true. But the *effects* of their counseling will be the same as if they *had been* intentionally treacherous. That’s why I say that they belong in Dante’s ninth circle!

It is truly a paradox that “activists” against global warming are quite possibly “contributing” more to the demise of our species than are “deniers,” for these activists are giving people false hope—lulling people into believing that engaging in trivial actions will “save” them. But, then, life is full of paradoxes.

Let me conclude this essay by returning to the second paragraph above, in which I asserted as advisable—from a *safety* standpoint—to assume a worst case scenario, and referred specifically to the projection made by John Davies that our species will be extinct before 2040. A question that may arise with some regarding this is: “What if that projection turns out to be *wrong*?” Will those who have *accepted* that projection, and *acted* on it, then have “[egg on their faces](#)”? Will those who have *followed* my advice not have been “alarmists” who should then “repent” for that fact?

My answer: On the contrary, they should be *happy* that catastrophe *didn’t* occur, and then go on to start creating a New Order to replace the rotten Order that has been, and is, in existence here and elsewhere.

Given that with global warming we are dealing with *physical laws*, it is highly doubtful, however, that disaster *will* be avoided. Sorry! Perhaps *extinction* will be avoided, but it’s doubtful that a severe *culling* will not occur. And if “only” a severe culling occurs, the “saved” are most likely to be those who have engaged in way-of-life change rather than mere lifestyle change.

Endnotes

1. Ironically, the number 350 ppm (of carbon dioxide, CO₂, in the atmosphere) was contradicted the next day by Dr. DeWitt during his talk, in which he noted that [280 ppm](#) was a more “natural” number for our atmosphere, in that for the past 2,000 years or so the CO₂ level hovered around that number (which fact has been determined through the examination of the ice in ice cores).
2. It is important to note that Dr. DeWitt is an “[evangelical](#)” Christian, and in an [interview](#) in 2006 made an interesting point about evangelicals—a point that he repeated on Sunday: “The interesting thing about evangelicals is that they don’t have the traditional structure you find in the mainline denominations. There’s no central governing board. No one’s in charge. That means that if there is a doctrine they have inadvertently picked up, or subconsciously picked up, and it seems to be wrong, they just discard it. You couldn’t do that in Lutheranism or Presbyterianism. You’d be tangling with stuff that was established hundreds of years ago, and you’d have to have committees and reports and probably nothing would change. Evangelicals can change at the drop of a hat. What is their guide? It’s the Bible.”

The fact that they can “change at the drop of a hat” means, to DeWitt, that if they can be convinced that environmental action can be demonstrated as Biblical, their mindset is such that they will feel obligated to engage in environmental action. As an evangelical himself, DeWitt is in a perfect position to convince fellow evangelicals that environmental action is Biblical—and he has, e.g., contributed to [The Green Bible](#) (2009) with that aim in mind. (Noted scientist [E. O. Wilson](#), a [secular humanist](#) who had been raised in “[fundamentalism](#)”—which overlaps with evangelicalism—has also, in his [The Creation](#) (2007), attempted to “reach out” to “[conservative](#)”

[Christians](#), but the fact that he is currently a secular humanist will likely make his intended audience suspicious of him.)

A final point here: Although Dr. DeWitt may be successful in convincing his fellow evangelicals to engage in environmental action, I have *no* confidence that he will steer them in the right direction!

3. After all, [“it’s better to be safe than sorry.”](#)
4. What *lifestyle change* entails is changing one’s *consumption* habits. One *remains* a consumer, but makes changes in the array of goods/services that one purchases. What *way-of-life change* involves, in contrast, is ceasing *being* a consumer!—ceasing being a part of the Existing Order.

A point emphasized by Dr. DeWitt during his talk is that it was important to engage in both local and national action. It was clear from what he said, however, that he did not have *way-of-life* change in mind!

5. Ostensibly, [Guy Dauncey’s *The Climate Challenge: 101 Solutions to Global Warming*](#) (2009) gives a comprehensive discussion of how to respond to global warming—for it presents solutions for Individuals, “champions,” communities, businesses, farmers, transportation, energy companies, governments, developing countries, the global, and “all of us.” However, “way of life” change is not among his solutions! Because it’s *unthinkable*, I guess!

[Sent to BNW on 5/21/2014.]

A Problem With “Believers”

Alton C. Thompson

I attended an environmental conference on the weekend of May 18 – 19, sponsored by the [Wisconsin Interfaith Power & Light \(WIPL\)](#) organization, with some involvement by the [Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin](#). A number of different “faith” groups were represented at the conference, along with about a dozen secular environmental groups (such as [350.org](#)). The featured presentation on Saturday was [James Balog’s](#) documentary *Chasing Ice*, and the featured speaker on Sunday was [Calvin B. DeWitt](#), Professor Emeritus of Environmental Studies at the [Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies](#) (named for former Wisconsin U. S. Senator [Gaylord A. Nelson](#)) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

What bothered me about the conference is that *no one* there—including the good professor—seemed to take global warming as seriously as it should be. That is, for no one present was [this statement](#) by John B. Davies from September 20, 2013—“The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040”—for example, on his or her “radar.” [<https://www.facebook.com/john.davies.33046736>]

So far as I could tell, all of those present were convinced that “lifestyle” changes, and free-time actions such as letter writing to politicians, were sufficient in addressing the problem. Now if the problem of global warming is so serious that a climate scientist could declare as a strong possibility that our species could become *extinct* before 2040 CE, it should be obvious to anyone with a brain that the beliefs of the climate change “believers” present at the conference—and all present *were* definitely “believers”—were faulty (to put it mildly!).

I should note here that John Davies is not the only climate scientist to be exceedingly pessimistic about the human future. [Guy R. McPherson](#), for example, in the Introduction of his *Going Dark* (2013) states: “Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.” And noted climate scientist [James Hansen](#), in a *New York Times* “op ed” on May 9, 2012, said:

Global warming isn’t a prediction. It is happening. That is why I was so troubled to read a recent [interview with President Obama](#) in *Rolling Stone* in which he said that [Canada](#) would exploit the [oil](#) in its vast tar sands reserves “regardless of what we do.” If Canada proceeds, and we do nothing, it will be game over for the climate.

Etc.

If it's *inevitable* that we are on our way to extinction, it's obvious lifestyle changes and letter writing amount to little more than "[fiddling while Rome burns](#)." What would make more sense—given that we cannot know *for sure*, at present, how the world will be in 2040 CE—is to engage in *way-of-life* change. I will not explore that possibility here, however, because what I want to address in this essay is this question, rather:

Why do so many “believers” in global warming—or “climate change,” if you prefer—believe that lifestyle change has any relevance in addressing the problem, given the dire warnings that some climate scientists have issued?

Here are a few possible answers:

- Giving such people the benefit of the doubt, there's the possibility that they are not *aware* of these dire warnings. As difficult as this is to believe, it *is* a possibility.
- They aren't aware of the fact that scientists—because their work is typically submitted for peer review—tend to be *cautious* in what they write and say. Thus, even when a scientist issues a strong warning, because the warning may be couched in non-explicit language, the “believer” reading the warning may not *perceive* the warning as a strong one.

Thus, Hansen's “game over for the climate” in the quotation above seemingly is referring just to *climate*, with the “game over” being somewhat ambiguous in meaning. My guess, however, is that Hansen, in making this statement, was hoping that the reader would “connect the dots” (to allude to a [terribly misleading commercial](#) by the American Petroleum Institute), and reach the conclusion that the continued burning of fossil fuels can only lead to disaster. The fact that he did not “spell out” exactly what he meant, however, leaves the door open to interpreting his statement in a more benign way.

- They may *sense* that what climate scientists are writing and saying has disastrous implications, but psychological mechanisms with which they are “equipped” suppress an *explicit* awareness of this possibility from their conscious minds. Thus, they have not *consciously* suppressed information of which they have become aware as to the seriousness of global warming, but their *unconscious* minds have done this for them—to provide them with some sort of psychological protection. (Not being a psychologist, I can't comment on the *nature* of that “protection.”) Insofar as this is the case, it's likely that some are more susceptible to this than others—so that those who *are* susceptible should not be faulted for something over which they have no conscious control.

The mind is an extremely complex organ so that it's conceivable, for example, that at an unconscious level one “realizes” that the situation we are in is (nearly) hopeless, and

mechanisms operating at an unconscious level then cause an individual to become involved in *350.org*, for example, because being part of the organization gives one a sense of community, gives one an opportunity for leadership (which one's work environment does not), etc.

It's also possible, I suppose, that one "realizes," at an unconscious level, that if there is to be "salvation," this will not be obtained via mere lifestyle change and letter writing, but only by something more drastic—namely, change in *way of life*. At the same time, however, one may "realize" that a change in way of life would be far more *drastic* than would be a change in lifestyle, so that unconscious mechanisms within the brain, in "recognizing" this, begin providing one with a series of "reasons" why a change in way of life is unfeasible, unnecessary, etc.—the result being that one makes no effort to engage in way of life change.

If drastic change is *forced* on one—e.g., termination from one's job, followed by homelessness—one is often able to find the strength and determination to adapt. I think, for example, of a friend of mine whose wife died six years ago, whose diabetes resulted in the amputation of his lower-left leg, who has neuropathy, and who is confined to a wheelchair—who is able, however, to maintain his sanity, and is determined to overcome his handicaps. When I visit him on Saturdays, I am always amazed by his "will to live"—telling myself that if I were in his position, I would be a "basket case." But that's probably not the case.

If drastic change in the way one lives is *forced* on one, it's likely that one will discover strengths in oneself that one did not realize one had. If, on the other hand, forcing is *not* present, one will tend to ignore warnings of coming disaster—or, stated more accurately, one's unconscious mind will do so, and one's behavior will be guided by one's unconscious mind rather than one's conscious mind.

What's so unfortunate about the fact that most "believers" in global warming fail to consciously realize its seriousness is that those whom they are able to "convert"—to change their lifestyle, write letters to politicians, etc.—are being led down a path likely to eventuate in disaster. If, instead, those people were encouraged to change their *way of life*—by, e.g., getting together with others and forming a "community-sufficient" eco-community—they would at least have a *chance* to be spared the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans shortly.

The "progress" of global warming may be such that our species will become extinct before 2040 CE, as John Davies has projected. But given that the future is, by definition, an unknown, it is foolish not to at least *try* to avoid a premature death via global warming—by changing one's way of life. Unfortunately, between the "deniers" in our midst and the "believers" it's likely that few, if any, will escape the ravages of global warming!

[Sent to BNW on 5/22/2014.]

More Irrelevant Blather

Alton C. Thompson

A [recent article](#) by Peter G. Cohen states:

Without our rapid and determined change, climate will cause whole populations and some nations to disappear in the next few decades. The great test of nations in this century is their ability to control global warming and assure the survival of their people.

The solution offered to the problem of “climate change”:

- We Must Have a Partnership with Nature
- Establish a Livable Climate Agency (LCA)
- Reduce the Pentagon
- We Urgently Need a National Campaign for Integrity

You have some great ideas, Mr. Cohen, and I perceive just two problems with them:

1. What you would *like* to see happen, *won't*.
2. Even if it *would*, it would *accomplish* little, if anything. We have allowed the genie to escape from the jar, and putting it back in is an impossible task. The title of your article expresses our current situation well: We are on a “suicide path.”

What Mr. Cohen’s suggestions fail to recognize is that, as [John Davies](#) has put it:

The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.

Note that Davies did not assert that it is a *certainty* that we are “at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event,” only *probably*. Thereby suggesting that, based on our current knowledge, it seems *likely* that the human species will go the way of the dinosaurs (but for different reasons) within 25 years, this is not an *inevitability*.

However, in not being an *inevitability*, this should not lead one to the conclusion that we should “wait it out” and see whether or not our extinction occurs. The inertia that governs our lives may cause many to do this—but engaging in such a “wait and see” game would be so obviously

foolish that it needs no comment. What is suggested, rather, is that we actively address the problem, there being at least three possible courses of action:

1. Engage in a massive effort to *reduce* the CO₂ level in the atmosphere from the current 400 ppm to what it “should” be—about [280 ppm](#) (rather than the [350 ppm](#) standard claimed by 350.org).
2. Switch, over a short period of time, to renewable sources of energy, so that little “excess” carbon dioxide is emitted into the atmosphere.
3. Assume that it is simply too late to halt further warming, and begin engaging in pre-adaptive activities, hoping that doing so will enable one to survive the ravages that global warming is now inflicting on us, and will do so increasingly over the next few decades.

As to my responses to these three possibilities:

1. The geo-engineering alluded to above simply won’t happen, so there is no point in discussing it as a possibility.
2. The switchover to renewable sources of energy won’t happen either; the “political will” for its rapid implementation isn’t present.
3. Note that points 1 and 2 refer to actions whose implementation would, of necessity, be done by *governmental* units, whereas point 3 refers to individuals and private organizations as the potential “actors.” Those actors that *do* (a) recognize the threat posed by global warming, (b) recognize that government is unlikely either to address the problem, or address it adequately, and then (c) decide to “take matters into their own hands” would be increasing their chances for survival.

What must be recognized by such “actors,” however, is that our situation today is virtually hopeless. Global warming is likely to “progress” at an accelerating rate, and at some point cause the collapse of our society. One should recognize *that* as an inevitability, and make plans accordingly—meaning that one should plan to provide for one’s basic needs (given that one will not be able to make purchases in stores).

Doing so would require that one live on a parcel of land large enough to enable this to occur—and at a location least likely to incur the wrath of Nature. What that would mean in most cases is *migration*. Because few people have the means to do so, and lack the skills necessary for self-sufficiency, this option is likely to be taken by few.

As a result, few are likely to survive the destruction that global warming will be inflicting on us humans—with the possibility that *no one* will! This is a sad prospect, of course, but is a *realistic* one.

In 2009 Ralph Nader published a book with the title [*Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!*](#)—and there is some merit in that assertion. That is, if some of the super-rich would (a) recognize the severity of the threat posed by global warming, (b) recognize that it's too late to halt the further “progress” of global warming, so that (c) only actions by individuals and private organizations *may* save some, but that (d) they lack the resources to act, so that (e) they use their resources to help individuals and private organizations to act, while (f) also advertising what they are doing . . . If all of this were to occur, it's possible that the number “saved” would be increased—including the lives of the super-rich involved!

But although this is a *possibility*, it is not a *likelihood*, unfortunately. Therefore—and ironically—few, if any, of the super-rich are likely to survive the coming “storm.” Perhaps *no one* will, of course; but if *some* do, the super-rich are unlikely to be among them!

[Sent to BNW on June 6, 2014]

Supernatural Selection: A Review

Alton C. Thompson

Recently I encountered a reference to Matt J. Rossano's⁵ [*Supernatural Selection: How Religion Evolved*](#).⁶ As the book's subtitle intrigued me, I went to the Amazon web site to find some information about the book. I found this, for example, there:

In *Supernatural Selection*, Rossano presents an evolutionary history of religion. Neither an apologist for religion nor a religion-basher, he draws together evidence from a wide range of disciplines to show the valuable—even essential—adaptive purpose served by systematic belief in the supernatural. The roots of religion stretch as far back as half a million years, when our ancestors developed the motor control to engage in social rituals—that is, to sing and dance together. Then, about 70,000 years ago, a global ecological crisis drove humanity to the edge of extinction. It forced the survivors to create new strategies for survival, and religious rituals were foremost among them.

In addition, a LeRoy W. Bloom, in the “Customer Comments” section, had stated of the book:⁷

Probably the best and most informative book I have ever read concerning this subject. I particularly liked the way he progressed from the beginnings of rituals, how they began, how these conclusions were arrived at by comparing traditional hunter gathers and other primates types of rituals, through shamanism and finally arriving at supernatural agents.

Those comments on the book made me even more interested in it, so I ordered a used copy of the book, and proceeded to read it.

Frankly, I found the book very disappointing, and decided that I would write my own review of the book—something that I have not done since my college days! What follows, then, are my reactions to the book, discussed under three headings:

- Eight Criticisms
- Rossano on Religion

⁵ Rossano is a [Professor of Psychology](#) at Southeastern Louisiana University.

⁶ New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁷ For a brief—and negative—commentary on this book see [this](#), by Cris Campbell, who has advanced degrees in anthropology, philosophy, and law.

- The “Evolution” of Religion per Rossano

Eight Criticisms

First, the *subtitle* of Rossano’s book—*How Religion Evolved*—suggests that (a) the focus of the book is on religion, (b) from a chronological, developmental standpoint. However, (1) the discussion is limited (p. 2) to the period 500,000 – 35,000 YBP (i.e., years before present), but (2) that fact is not emphasized in the book, and not even *adhered* to (as I will note later). Oddly, (3) the only *strictly* chronological discussion in the book occurs in Chapter 9, in his discussion of “Acts” 1 – 3 (pp. 197 – 199). In addition, (4) he states at one point (p. 147) that ancestor worship emerged *after* shamanism; given that animism likely *preceded* shamanism, his discussion on pp. 63 -77 is in *reverse* order—which makes no sense whatsoever! That is, ancestor worship is discussed first, followed by shamanism, then animism!

Also, (5) given that evolution in a *biological* sense is given attention in the book, the author is clearly confused regarding whether the subject matter of his book is about (a) the evolution of *religion* or, rather, (b) the evolution of *humans*—and the role that religion *may* have played in that evolution. In addition, the author says (p. 18) that he hopes to give a “coherent narrative” in the book, but given that the presentation in the book has so little *chronological* discussion (which one is led to *expect* by the book’s subtitle), if there is anything that the book *does not* have, it is *coherence*!

Second, a vast amount of previous research is surveyed in the book (the References section runs from p. 237 to 287!), but it is often difficult to relate these various findings to the book’s main (ostensible) objective, a discussion of *how* religion evolved. Indeed, it almost seems that if one were to cite *examples* in support of this claim, one would need to cite *most of the book*! For that reason, I’ll “pass” on citing examples here!

In part, this problem would seem to stem from the book’s lack of a chronological organization, but one suspects also that (a) the author has not “digested” these various research findings thoroughly, and (b) may also have been in a hurry to complete the book.

Third, one can object to the use of the word “evolve” relative to religion. If one is a “purist” (as I am), one will insist that the word “evolution” be used *only* in conjunction with *biological* changes in species—the term *monotypic* evolution being appropriate for referring to biological changes in a *given* species over time, and *polytypic* evolution referring to the emergence of a new species (or species plural) from a given species.⁸ With changes of a *non-biological* nature one may perhaps “throw in” the word “evolution” to add an air of sophistication to one’s presentation, but *religion* should *not* be said to evolve (the terms “develop” and “change over time” should be used, rather). Nor should *society* be said to “evolve” (as on p. 128).

⁸ These two terms were introduced by [J. T. Gulick](#).

Fourth, on pp. 41 – 43 Rossano discusses the concept of “natural selection,” defining that term in Darwinian terms. [Charles Darwin](#), in his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), had said (quoting here from the [1872 edition](#), p. 49), regarding *monotypic* evolution⁹:

Owing to this struggle [for existence, with one’s conspecifics], variations, however slight, and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to the physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man’s power of selection [via breeding]. But the expression often used by Mr. Herbert Spencer of the Survival of the Fittest is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient.

Earlier, in the Introduction (p. 3), Darwin had written:

In the next chapter the Struggle for Existence amongst all organic beings throughout the world, which inevitably follows from the high geometrical ratio of their increase, will be considered. This is the doctrine of [Thomas] Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms.

Thus, Darwin’s concept of “natural selection” was based on the *speculations* of [Rev. Thomas Malthus](#) rather than empirical research.

Two questions can be raised regarding Rosanno’s discussion of natural selection: Given its utter irrelevance in explaining human evolution (the relevant factors being environmental change,¹⁰ predation,¹¹ and female-choice sexual selection¹²), why did Rosanno give it *any* attention at all in his book? And given that the subject matter of the book is (ostensibly) the “evolution” of *religion*, not the evolution of the *human* species, why is *biological* evolution *per se* given *any* attention in the book?!

⁹ The title of Darwin’s book suggests that it is about *polytypic* evolution. Why, then, did he place so much emphasis on a concept—i.e., natural selection—that relates to *monotypic* evolution, and even then has *no relevance whatsoever* for many species, including the *human* species?

¹⁰ Emphasized by [Steven M. Stanley](#)—e.g., in his [The New Evolutionary Timetable](#) (1981).

¹¹ See, e.g., [Man the Hunted](#) by Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman (2005).

¹² See, e.g., Nancy M. Tanner’s [On Becoming Human](#) (1981) and Erika L. Milam’s [Looking for a Few Good Males](#) (2011).

Fifth, the fact that Rossano is a “believer” in Darwinian natural selection¹³ helps explain why the word “competition” appears so frequently in his book—often, it would seem, inappropriately. Here are some examples:

- On p. 39 he states that *Homo sapiens sapiens* competed with Neanderthals. This raises the question: What *proof* does he have to offer in support of that claim? Were, e.g., conditions so crowded at the time that competition between the two groups was “inevitable”? Even if conditions *were* crowded (unlikely!¹⁴), and if the members of *our* species were “superior” to Neanderthals in various respects, why would that *necessarily* result in competition between the two species? Isn’t it more likely that the “inferior” species would try to *avoid* contact with the “superior” one?! After all, the Neanderthals had mobility and, therefore, an *ability* to occupy areas other than those occupied by our species.
- On pp. 48 – 49 he discusses “group-level competition”—implying that groups compete with one another, with one group “winning” over others, the members of the “winning” group living (and later producing progeny), and the members of the “losing” group(s) dying prematurely. What this “scenario” ignores is the possibility of what economist Armin Alchian termed “environmental adoption” in a [famous paper](#). That is, inter-group competition may have as little relevance as Darwinian natural selection in explaining who does, and does not, survive. In addition, his discussion of “group-level competition” is based on pure speculation rather than any supporting empirical evidence.
- On p. 167 he states that “religious groups” tend to be “more competitive” than non-religious groups, and states the reasons for this. It may or may not be true that religious groups are “more competitive,” but the question that arises here is: What *relevance* does this matter have for the ostensible theme of this book, that of the “evolution” of *religion*? (As Ring Lardner, Jr., put it in his [The Young Immigrants](#) (1920, p. 78): “Shut up he explained”!)
- On p. 208 he declares: “If religion is an adaptation, then of course it evolved out of competition.” But competition with *what*? And if this is your fundamental explanation

¹³ Today, “natural selection” is typically given a rather [amorphous meaning](#)—one that is basically vacuous in that it makes reference to no mechanism(s) of biological change. Darwin’s “natural selection” at least had the virtue of making reference to a “mechanism” that would result in biological change; unfortunately, however, that “mechanism” is merely a *hypothetical* one with little basis in reality!

¹⁴ Granted that the two species were likely “designed” for the same “niche.” However, it is difficult to believe that that niche was so small—relative to the numbers in each species—that competition between the two species would have occurred “inevitably.”

for the “evolution” of religion, where is your carefully argued/presented discussion in support of this claim?!

Sixth, his discussions of the “supernatural” leave much to be desired. A useful starting point here is to recognize (a) that Rossano had stated (p. 2) that the time frame for his book was the period 500,000 – 35,000 YBP, but (b) he had stated this in a rather “offhand” manner, i.e., without any emphasis—perhaps in the hope that this limitation would go unnoticed. However, the “cutoff” date chosen for the book *is*, in fact, important, in that the “supernatural” developments that he discusses—chronologically, animism, shamanism, and ancestor “worship”—all occurred *before* the “god” concept was created!¹⁵ Why, then, does the word “god” appear frequently in the book? There might be justification for a few such references but not the number actually made in the book. This fact of numerous references to an entity that lies outside the chronological scope of the book is further evidence of the author’s confusion.

It should be noted that the word “[supernatural](#)” itself refers to “that which is said to exist above and beyond nature”—and not subject to the physical laws that “govern” the cosmos. Given this fact, one trained in the *sciences* may very well argue that the “supernatural” (*so defined*) is simply a human invention that *does* not exist, for the simple reason that it *cannot* exist. Individuals trained in the sciences, that is, are likely to regard the “supernatural” as a mere fiction with no basis in empirical reality. For *most* in our society, however (I suspect), “supernatural” not only refers to something *real* (if intangible), but refers especially (a) to a *transcendent Being* “out there someplace that we (English-speaking people) call “[God](#),” (b) to “[angels](#)” and other Heavenly Beings, even (c) to, e.g., “[demons](#)” and (d) to God’s adversary, “[Satan](#)”—made famous by [Flip Wilson](#) in his “The devil made me do it” line.

The fact of the matter, however, is that “supernatural” *can* be given a variety of meanings, and *is* by, e.g., Rossano, so that if a writer *does* conceive “supernatural” in broad terms (as does Rossano), to avoid confusion on the part of readers, the writer should *avoid* using the word “supernatural,” and instead use terms with more *specific* meanings, for the various *manifestations* of the “supernatural” that s/he recognizes. This “obvious” principle is violated frequently by Rossano, however. At one point (p. 103) Rossano relates shamanism with the supernatural,¹⁶ but that is a rare example.

¹⁵ Rossano’s statement (p. 1) that “there most certainly was a time before the idea of God (or gods)” —in its reference to “idea” of God/gods—suggests that Rossano recognized that “god” is a *humanly-created* concept. Also, on pp. 11 – 12 Rossano states: “At a certain point in our evolutionary [past], humans added a supernatural layer to their social world.” (But *why* did this occur?! Rossano often does not seem to recognize when he is being glib!)

¹⁶ He states: “While rituals of reconciliation, trust-building, and initiation very likely involved supernatural elements, shamanistic rituals were the first to explicitly invoke the supernatural.” Note

Rossano dates (p. 19) the “birth” of the idea of a supernatural to around 70,000 YBP¹⁷—some time fairly soon after the eruption (p. 18) of Mt. Toba, which “brought on a global ecological crisis,” so that “humans nearly went extinct.”¹⁸ In making this claim he fails, however, to specify the *characteristics* that may have been given to the supernatural at that time. Nor does he offer any explanation of *why* the idea of a supernatural was invented at that time.

Later (p. 158), however, in discussing shamanism he asserts that “social rituals that affected individuals’ conscious states undoubtedly predated shamanism,” and refers to “healing rituals that called upon a supernatural force.” He then adds this, however: “To our ancestors, this force was probably not seen as “supernatural.”” Thus, Rossano first informs us that the idea of a supernatural emerged around 70,000 years ago, then later tells us that this “supernatural force” was probably not perceived as “supernatural”! This raises the question: If the idea of a supernatural had *not* been born 70,000 YBP, as you first claimed, when, then, *was* it born?! Yes, indeed!

As disturbing as the above facts are, even more disturbing (in my mind) is Rossano’s inability to stay “on track”—regarding the question of whether his objective is to discuss the “evolution” of religion (down to 35,000 YBP) or, rather, religion as a factor in *human* evolution. The very *title* of his book suggests the *latter* orientation, while the *subtitle* suggests the *former*! And the presentation in the book alternates between the two:

- On p. 4 he offers a partial explanation of why humans invented the idea of a supernatural: Our “agency detection system” makes us prone to offer explanations of otherwise unexplainable natural events by inventing *supernatural* agents. (It may *enable* us to do so, but “obviously” this is only a *necessary* factor, not a *sufficient* one. And how did this “system” come into being anyway?)
- On the same page he argues that our “attachment system” (which promotes “fitness”—i.e., survival—by compelling infants to stay close to caregivers), in conjunction with our agency detection system, could “compel” us to seek emotional attachments to perceived supernatural agents. (How did this *new* “system” come into being? And if you are saying that this is a *cause* of our invention of the supernatural, you fail to recognize that your argument has a “missing link”: One can form an “attachment” with the supernatural only *after* the supernatural has been created! And if the supernatural involved is only a

here that what was involved with “supernatural elements” is left ambiguous—including that associated with “shamanistic rituals.”

¹⁷ This occurred near the end of what Rossano refers to as the “African Interregnum”—a period extending from 100,000 – 60,000 YBP.

¹⁸ On p. 62 he notes that *Homo sapiens* was possibly reduced to “about 2,000 breeding individuals”

“force,” is it even *possible* for one to form an attachment with it?! Doesn’t it seem conceivable that attachment to the supernatural was only *possible* when ancestor “worship” emerged—meaning that the *original* attachments were with *ancestors*? And that when, at a later point in time, attachments with *gods* began, the *nature* of those attachments differed in *character* from the attachments with ancestors?

- An interesting hypothesis offered by Rossano (but not as a “mere” hypothesis!) is that once humans could conceive of supernatural relations, those relationships (p. 9) “exerted a similar mediating effect on all [of] their other relationships.” “The natural world was no longer simply inert matter, but a living gift of the creator, with its own spiritual and social reality.” (You are getting ahead of yourself, Dr. Rossano, for a *creator* god was not created until *after* 35,000 YBP!)
- Continuing with his thesis, on p. 19 he argues: “By adding the supernatural to their social world (i.e., by ‘supernaturalizing’ their social lives), our ancestors created strongly cohesive and formidably competitive social groups.”

What Rossano seems to be “getting at” here is that by adding the supernatural to their social world, humans were creating *cohesive* groups—groups that *thereby* had an enhanced ability to survive, so that this addition became a factor in human evolution. Thus, it appears that the supernatural is being discussed in the book *only* because it played a role in *human* evolution! But:

- If a “supernatural layer” was added in *all* human groups, why would any *particular* group have a “competitive” advantage over other groups?
- What *evidence* do you have that groups of the same species actually *competed* with each other?
- Don’t you recognize that the cohesiveness of a group could have resulted from factors other than, or in addition to, the existence of a “supernatural layer”—such as the pressures for group formation created by predators, and the selectivity involved with (female-choice) sexual selection? By not considering *other* possible factors, you weaken your argument—an argument that *shouldn’t even be offered here* given your ostensible purpose of discussing the “evolution” of *religion*, not *humans*! For *religion* to “evolve,” it is obviously necessary for humans to continue in existence, perhaps evolving in the process. And although it’s reasonable to expect that as *societal* change occurs, so will *religion(s)* change, but with a substantial lag, perhaps (!); *human* evolution, however, may be accompanied by much less change of a *religious* nature.

- Referring to research by a Jesse Bering, Rossano notes (p. 125) that “our representations of supernatural agents are often implicitly constrained by our experience.” Wow! What a brilliant research finding! Humans created ideas of the supernatural, and our representations reflect us. Who would’ve thunk it!

Seventh, Rossano reviews a huge body of modern empirical research studies, and his apparent reason for doing so is his belief that the results of these studies have *universal* application. As I noted under point two above, one wonders about much of this research what its relevance is to the ostensible main theme, the “evolution” of religion. Related to that point, there is reason to question the assumption that the study of modern people will yield results *directly* applicable to people living thousands of years ago.

This criticism applies especially to the child research discussed in Chapter 5 (pp. 103 – 126), the following findings being examples:

- Being (p. 107) “absorbed in an imaginary world does not harm the child’s ability to distinguish fantasy from reality; indeed, some studies suggest that highly imaginative children may be more capable of making this distinction.”
- There is (p. 110) “evidence that imagination facilitates social skills in adults. As adults read fiction, they typically become absorbed in the author’s narrative world, vicariously experiencing events from the protagonist’s perspective. Frequent fiction-readers score higher on measures of empathy, reading emotions from facial expressions, and other measures of social acumen.” (Are you suggesting that our ancestors, of millennia ago, read fiction??!)
- Rossano believes (p. 118) that “children’s supernatural imaginings” became “incorporated into adult social life. I think [that] there are two natural entry points from which the supernatural imagination of children could make its way into the adult social world: ritual and the soul.” (What Rossano seems to be suggesting here is that it was *children* who invented the supernatural, and that adults then “learned” the concept of a supernatural from children. Questions: (a) What do you *mean* here by “supernatural”? (b) *When* did children first invent this concept, and (c) when did adults then *learn* it from children? You are going to have to provide a more substantial argument than the one that you have offered in the book to get me to believe this!!)

A final criticism, and one already referred to in footnote 11, is Rossano’s tendency to be glib. Here are some examples:

- On p. 117 he uses the term “selects for.”¹⁹ (*How* is the “selection” alluded to here accomplished? Via Darwinian “natural selection”? Environmental change? Predation”? Sexual selection? The term itself gives one no idea of *what*, specifically, is involved.)
- Also on p. 117 there occurs the term “fitness advantage.” Presumably this refers to a high likelihood of survival, but does the “fitness” referred to here refer to having *characteristics* which (a) allow one to win in competition with conspecifics (assuming that such competition occurs!), characteristics which (b) *favor* one in being chosen by females for mating purposes, characteristics that (c) enable one to fit the environment, or what? (The terms “fitness benefits,” on p. 154, “reproductive success,” on pp. 154 and 204, and “fitness enhancing,” on p. 202, are related terms.)
- On p. 145 we find this statement: “While more recent evidence has shown that there was an incremental run-up to the Upper Paleolithic, it still appears that a cognitive/social tipping point was achieved around this time [after the Interregnum].” (A “tipping point” is a point in time after which change in some specified variable(s) begins to change rapidly. But *why* did a “tipping point” occur—and occur at this *time*—in “cognitive-social” development?)
- Rossano states on p. 174: “Over the course of evolution, nature found ways of getting selfish organisms to set aside immediate self-interest in order to aid family, reap a returned favor later, gain benefits through reputation, or gain the benefits associated with being party of a well-organized, cooperative group.” (By identifying the causative agent here as “nature” Rossano is being glib in the extreme, thereby avoiding the bother of offering an actual *explanation* for why—supposedly—“immediate self-interest” got “set aside”!)
- On p. 180 this statement occurs: “Likewise, while it obviously seems more moral to be universalistic than tribalistic, it is not easily done, given our basic nature and the cultural differences often encountered when defining ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’” (In referring to “our basic nature” he seems to be saying that humans are “naturally” selfish, competitive, etc. This is a rather surprising suggestion coming from him, given that his references include six works authored or co-authored by [Frans de Waal](#), including de Waal’s [Good Natured](#) (2006). The question raised here is: Has Rossano actually *read* works by de Waal and others, who argue for a biological basis for “good” behavior?!)

Rossano on Religion

¹⁹ Here is the statement in which this occurs: “Increasing social complexity selects for generally more imaginative children because these children tend to grow into more socially skilled adults.” (Where, by the way, is your evidence in support of this assertion?!)

Before summarizing, and commenting upon, Rossano's discussion of the "evolution"—or, as I prefer, the *development*—of religion, it is advisable first to comment on what he writes about religion *per se*.

If one sets out to write a book about the "evolution" (or development) of religion (in Rossano's case, down to 35,000 YBP), it is essential that one begin by clarifying the *meaning* that one is attaching to "religion"—so that one's focus will be on religion, and *only* religion. As we have already seen, Rossano has violated this "rule" in that although he exhibits an interest in the development of religion, he also gives attention to *human evolution*, including the role of *religion* in human evolution. It is a confused and incomplete such discussion, to be sure, but a discussion none the less. The topic of interest in this section, however, is how Rossano *conceives* "religion"—i.e., the *meaning* that he attaches to that term.

He begins the book by declaring (p. 1) that "the book seeks to answer a very straightforward question: How did religion come to be?"—i.e., (as the subtitle of his book states), how religion "evolved." He asserts that "As far back as we can trace human history, there has always been religion." Although one suspects that the *nature* of religion has *changed* over time (given that it has "evolved"), *that* possibility neither clarifies for us *what* religion is, nor *how* and *why* it changed over time. Thus, precious little enlightenment occurs in the first two paragraphs of the book.

In the second paragraph he states (pp. 1 - 2) that the book aims to "provide a clearly specified, step-by-step model of religion's evolutionary history." The first sentence of the book leads us to believe that we will be presented with a *historical* account, not a mere historical "model" But as I indicated earlier, the book fails to deliver—as chronology plays a decisive "second fiddle" to other organization principles²⁰ in this book.

On p. 2 we are presented with a *comment* on religion, but it is not really a *definition*: "Religion is about relationships. In other words, religion is a way that humans relate to each other and to the world around them." This may be true, but it does not tell us what religion *is*, and how it is *differentiated* from other societal phenomena.

Near the bottom of p. 2 Rossano boasts (seemingly) about the fact that his "model" of religion does not "fit in" with the currently prevailing "theories" of religion, which he then lists and discusses briefly (pp. 3 - 8):

1. Commitment theories.
2. Cognitive theories.

²⁰ Please don't ask me what those "other" principles are!

3. Ecological theories.
4. Performance theories.
5. Experiential theories.

On p. 8 he notes that an Anthony Wallace had argued that religion is not a “thing” but, rather, a *collection of activities*, with 13 activities being then listed. Rossano evidently agrees with this concept of religion, for he had asserted earlier (p. 3) that religion is “multifaceted,” and repeats that term on p. 193.

After Rossano listed the 13 activities, he claimed that there is a “common thread” connecting the activities, that of “relating.” We then come as close as we ever do to a definition of religion from Rossano (p. 8): “***Religion is a way of relating where supernatural agents are active players. Supernatural relationships act as ‘mediating’ influences on people’s other relationships.***”²¹ It seems reasonably clear, then, that for Rossano what a “religion” involves is (a) relationships in which (b) the supernatural²² plays some sort of role; that is, individuals relate one to another and the supernatural, and the supernatural also relates to humans (so that petitionary prayers are a rational activity). Whether one regards this as a clear, satisfying definition will likely vary from person to person

On p. 20 he refers to “religious beliefs,” thereby seemingly asserting that a religion involves not only relationships and the supernatural, but *beliefs* as well—about the supernatural, and other matters as well, one can assume. Assumedly, the addition of beliefs reflects his exposure to Christianity, which has its [Nicene](#) and [Apostles’](#) creeds, e.g.

Still later (p. 127), he seemingly adds a fourth necessary component to “religion,” in stating that a religion needs both *imagistic* and doctrinal elements. In learning of these two *later* additions, one begins to wonder if Rossano even *has* a clear concept of “religion”!

We also find “waffling” when it comes to his discussion of the *origin* of religion. On p. 129 he notes—favorably—that [William James](#) had argued that religion is essentially *emotional*, rather than *philosophical*, or even *intellectual*.²³ Thus, Rossano has now not only evidently added a *fifth* “dimension” to his concept of what is “essential” to religion, but in adding (p. 130) that the *roots of religious emotions are in primate emotions* is in effect identifying *emotion* as the basis

²¹ I have added the italics and bolding to this sentence. (My bad!)

²² Meaning, then, that [Buddhism](#) is not a religion! If Buddhists learned this, it might make them angry. Oh, that’s right; it’s hard to make a Buddhist angry!

²³ Evidently, then [Unitarianism](#) is not a religion—a “fact” that will surprise, and shock, Unitarians!

for religion. That is, we have a *genetic proclivity* for having and expressing emotions, including *religious* emotions. He neglected to add, however, that the “fact” that emotions are associated with *religion* does not differentiate it from *other* societal institutions.

On the very next page, (p.131), and referring—approvingly, it would seem—to a Stewart Guthrie, he notes a “pervasive human tendency to anthropomorphize nature, which forms the basis of religion.” What is particularly odd about Rossano’s adding this *second* explanation of the *basis* of religion is that he argues (as we shall see in the next section) that *animism* was the first form of religion—and that anthropomorphizing was *not* associated with animism! How *could* it be, after all?!

On p 137 Rossano declares that *primate* ritual became human *religious* ritual—so that we now learn that primates not only contributed *emotions* to humans (including to our religions—among other institutions), but also contributed *ritual* to us—with that ritual all “ending up” in our religions, Rossano implies! Thus, *ritual* is now added as a *third* basis of religion, but one that takes a “back seat” to anthropomorphizing, e.g., given that *that* is supposedly the “basis of religion,”²⁴ per both Guthrie and Rossano, right?! (This is getting confusing!)

On p. 145 Rossano states that group-coordinated activities were the essence of “religion” prior to the African Interregnum—i.e., prior to 100,000 YBP, when it began. This seemingly suggests that Rossano is now adding *another* necessary defining element of “religion,” while simultaneously saying—by putting “religion” in quotation marks—that there was no “true” religion prior to 100,000 YBP—with, however, group-coordinated activities “setting the stage” for the emergence of religion. In suggesting *that*, he seems to saying that the basis for religion is not only (or *not at all*?!) the three identified earlier, but group-coordinated activities—*earlier* group-coordinated activities, specifically.

On p. 204 Rossano notes that some believe that religion is *ingrained* in the human psyche—which seems to suggest that we humans are biologically “programmed” for religion (a *fifth* “dimension” now?—which, if true, would be the *only* relevant one!). Now if Rossano *accepts* this “theory” (he does not clearly *reject* it!), the question suggested here is: *Why*, then, did he waste space—and the reader’s time!—discussing the *other* bases? And if, rather, he *rejects* that explanation (which is *implicit* in his prior discussion of bases), why didn’t he *explicitly* reject it?

In reading Rossano, we find him continually adding “essential” elements of religion, and changing his views regarding religion’s basis (or bases), and he doesn’t even seem to be *aware* of that fact! While reading his book, one gains the sense that one is walking in quicksand, and

²⁴ Of course, if anthropomorphizing is *the* basis of religion, *ritual* is not only in the “back seat,” but not in the automobile, period!

that one will *never* gain a clear idea of *how* he conceives “religion,” nor what he believes about its *basis* or bases—for the simple reason that it becomes increasingly apparent that he *has* none!

In sensing this, it is easy to reach the conclusion that one must escape from this confusion before one drowns—and then have a beer or two (or²⁵ . . . !) to prevent one from going insane!

The “Evolution” of Religion per Rosanno ²⁶

In my “Eight Criticisms” section I noted the surprising fact that for a book on the “evolution” of religion, Rossano’s book is utterly lacking in a *chronological* presentation—that the “only strictly chronological discussion in the book occurs in Chapter 9, in his discussion of ‘Acts’ 1 – 3 (pp. 197 – 199).” I also noted there the *extremely* odd fact that although the order of development presumably was animism, then shamanism,²⁷ then ancestor “worship,” his discussion of these on pp. 63 – 77 is in *reverse* order! For Rossano, time evidently goes in reverse! If he is right, we may have nothing to fear from global warming!²⁸

Rossano had noted at the beginning of his book that the time frame for his “study” of religion’s “evolution” was the period 500,000 – 35,000 YBP. Why 500,000 YBP was chosen as his starting point is something that we finally learn on p. 143, where Rossano asserts that behavior beyond the practical goes back that far. Rossano may be correct in making that assertion—i.e., there may be solid archeological evidence in support of that assertion—but the assertion itself raises at least two questions:

1. Why did such behavior begin at that time?
2. What was its *relevance* for religion—given that Rossano is never clear about the meaning that he is attaching to “religion”?!

As to what Rossano’s “theory” is as to the “evolution” of religion, it is hard to *find* one in Rossano’s book!—leading one to believe that he doesn’t *have* one! If Rossano *does* have one, he

²⁵ Having been born and raised in Wisconsin, and now living in a Milwaukee suburb, it would be “unpatriotic” of me to declare that one should stop at two!

²⁶ Rossano’s 55-page .pdf file, “Supernaturalizing Social Life: Religion and the Evolution of Human Cooperation,” can be obtained by using a search engine. For those interested, that is—which you may *not* be, after reading this critique of the book!

²⁷ For a discussion of both animism and shamanism that makes reference to Rossano, see [this](#).

²⁸ Climate scientist John Davies [wrote last year](#): “The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.” Now that I know that time moves *backward*, I would like to inform Dr. Davies about this. Unfortunately, however, I don’t know his email address.

hides it well—as if he’s involved in playing the childhood game of “[hide and seek](#).” Because of this fact, and because I regard my time as too valuable to play “hide and seek” with Rossano, I refuse to waste any more of my time searching for his (supposed) “theory.” As a consequence, the discussion that follows will not be thorough, and may not even be completely accurate—but so be it!

On p. 147 he asserts that shamanism emerged during the period 70,000 – 35,000 YBP, which leaves one to wonder what developments occurred between his starting point—500,000 YBP—and 70,000. During that period *animism* presumably arose, but he says little about animism.²⁹ He had stated earlier (p. 137) that an ability to move rhythmically together was necessary for *primate* ritual to become *religious* ritual—suggesting that dancing, chanting, etc. began to occur with humans during this early period, constituting early human ritual—“religious” ritual, in fact. Seemingly the reason he refers to early ritual as being “religious” is that (p. 141) dancing led to a “murky” spiritual sense. How all of this related to animism is not made clear, however.

The eruption of Mt. Toba around 70,000 years ago led to very unfavorable conditions for humans (p. 80), and they confronted this challenge by using ritual, he claims. This claim leads us to the question: Is *this* when humans began engaging in rituals (rather than much earlier, as we were led to believe) or, rather, did “special” new rituals come into being during this period that were especially effective in helping humans cope during this “rough” period? And if the *latter* is the case, what evidence can you provide in *support* of that “fact”?

In his discussion of the use of rituals to help confront the environmental challenges in the aftermath of the eruption of Mt. Toba, Rossano states that (p. 83) the use of ritual helped promote group harmony, and the development of social and cognitive skills; it (p. 85) contributed to the development of symbolic thinking, which enabled cultural accumulation; and also (p. 86) contributed to the development of “working memory,” which helped one to “keep on track;” and (p. 87) enabled “shared intentionality.” Now I will admit that this is all “fine and dandy,” but it leads me to ask:

1. What does any of this have to do with the “evolution” of religion?!
2. Do you have *proof* that these various developments occurred, or are just *guessing* that they did?

On p. 146 he asserts that creation myths emerged after shamanistic activities had been in place for 10,000 years—which, unfortunately, makes it difficult to pinpoint when *that* was, given that shamanism itself emerged somewhere between 70,000 and 35,000 YBP! Also, I guess that if

²⁹ It is *mentioned* in a few places in the book, but given *attention* only in his “Animal and Natural Spirits” section on pp. 74 – 77. For example, he begins the section with the statement that “The belief in a spiritual force pervading all of nature is common among hunter-gatherers.”

creation myths are being created, that *must* mean that some sort of religion *also* exists—for creations are obviously done by, and *only* by, supernatural beings!

On p. 199 he declares that ancestor “worship” emerged 50,000 – 30,000 YBP, which adds difficulties to his chronology—difficulties that he, “asleep at the wheel,” (?) doesn’t seem to realize. For if shamanism *could* have emerged as late as 35,000 YBP, then ancestor “worship” could *not* have emerged 50,000 YBP!

He claims that (p. 147) ancestor “worship” emerged after some social stratification had begun, with elites gaining status by appealing to the “supernatural” then existing—whatever *that* was! But given that social stratification only became important in human history *after* the [Agricultural Revolution](#) that began around 10,000 – 12,000 YBP—i.e., *long after Rossano’s stopping point of 35,000 YPB!*—one wonders why he is bringing social stratification into the picture!

A final point: It would seem that the veneration of ancestors provided the basis for the invention of “gods,” but Rossano does not mention that possibility—either because their invention occurred after his stopping point, or because he just doesn’t perceive such a possibility. Certainly this would seem to be an interesting possibility to explore, but I most definitely would not look to Rossano to do so—for whatever he would produce would likely be a “botched job”!

In ordering this book by Rossano I was looking forward to reading it, but as the above discussion indicates, I find it difficult to believe that the Oxford University Press chose to publish it. To atone for the fact that I have read the book, I have felt it necessary to comment on it in some detail here. Having now put the book behind me, I can breathe easier, and get on to what I regard as of more importance. By the way, a few days ago I consigned my copy of the book to the recycle bin!

Capitalism: A Reversible Mistake?

Alton C. Thompson

In the United States “capitalism” is often equated with “Americanism,” so that to criticize capitalism is to be unpatriotic. One suspects that such an attitude has not arisen “naturally” but, rather, has become widespread as a result of promotional efforts by those having a vested interest in the *status quo*—a consequence of such promotion being that even many of those *not* having such a vested interest have become staunch supporters of capitalism. The fact that so many have an almost “religious” commitment to capitalism means, of course, not only that (a) few are brave enough to offer negative comments regarding capitalism, but that (b) there is little reason to have hope that capitalism can be replaced—or even reformed.[1]

Although there *is* a distinction between capitalism as a *set of ideas* and “on the ground” capitalism, many in our society seem to believe that the set of ideas regarding the nature of capitalism *is*, in fact, realized “on the ground.” That is, for many in our society there is no discrepancy between the “theory” of capitalism and its reality. Although it may be extremely difficult to *correct* this common perception—*misperception*, actually—it may, nonetheless, be of value, to note—as I do here—the flawed nature of the “*theory*” of capitalism—in the hope that if some come to recognize the “obvious” flaws in capitalist “theory,” they will *abandon* it—or at least reduce their *devotion* to it.

I suspect that people vary in *why* they are committed to the capitalist “model” (a [more apt term](#) than “theory”):

- Some realize that it is seriously flawed, but sense that it *serves their interests*, and therefore embrace and promote, it.
- Some accept it out of a *superficial understanding* regarding what it actually “says.”
- With some such individuals there may be *psychological* reasons why they “latch onto” the model: It gives them a sense of comfort, security, a sense that they know something that others don’t, etc.
- Etc.

In discussing the capitalist model, a useful starting point is to recognize that (a) “free enterprise” is a term that briefly captures what the model is “about,” and also recognize (b) the

circumstances that provided the *motivation* for its development. Regarding the latter, John [Kilcullen has stated](#):

The free enterprise movement began in the 18th century as a protest against various restrictions on business enterprise imposed by governments and by corporations sanctioned by government. Corporations (guilds, colleges, companies, universities) had existed since Roman times, ostensibly to guarantee their member's good behaviour, and especially good service to the public. But they served their members' interests also at the expense of the public by restricting competition. Non-members were excluded from the trade; to become a member one had to serve a long and low-paid apprenticeship to an established member, and to pay various sums of money (for entry fee, graduation fee, compulsory gifts and banquets, etc.). Government sanctioned these practices, and imposed restrictions of its own, ostensibly in the public interest, but also to raise revenue and to provide fees and bribes for officials: the guild had to pay for its monopoly. Viewed cynically, government was an ancient and successful branch of organised crime, a respectable protection racket.

That is, the free enterprise movement did not arise “out of thin air;” rather, it arose *in response* to *particular real-world conditions* that existed. Ironically, however, the *model* that was developed of capitalism was formulated with *universalistic* principles (as we shall see shortly).

Both of these facts are important, for they illustrate the fact that theories/models that are created—and perhaps especially ones involving *humans*—often (always?) *reflect the time* in which they are created. *That* fact implies that over time a given theory/model might very well become increasingly obsolete, “necessitating” the development of a new theory/model. In fact, however, a given theory/model often continues to live on “past its time”—especially if the elite benefits from the theory/model. Which would seem to explain why the *capitalist* model is still with us!

I asserted above that the capitalist model was formulated with *universalistic* principles—and that that *also* reflected the time in which it was developed. Let me next, then, develop this point—as it is of extreme importance, in that it is the *basic* reason why the capitalist model is deeply—and “obviously”!—flawed.

The first point to note here is that [Adam Smith](#) [1723 – 1790] is usually given credit for the initial formulation of capitalist “theory”—although Smith never himself used the word “capitalist.” [2] Given Smith’s role in developing the capitalist model, a good starting point, in acquainting oneself with the “flavor” of Smith’s thought, is to examine the following statement, which appears in his [The Theory of Moral Sentiments](#) (1759) [3]

The produce of the soil maintains at all times nearly that number of inhabitants which it is capable of maintaining. The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural

selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition. These last too enjoy their share of all that it produces. In what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, and the beggar, who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for.

This passage is notable for being the [first of only three times](#) that Smith used “invisible hand” in his writings. [4]

We can “glean” from this passage Smith’s beliefs that:

- The rich are *naturally* selfish and rapacious.
- By implication, then, the poor and those with middle income do not have those characteristics—which is odd because it raises the question: How can *some* individuals be “naturally” one way while *other* individuals are *not* that way?! Are we not all members of the same species?!
- The rich have “vain and insatiable desires.”
- Everyone consumes about the same amount, with the rich consuming just a little more. Given, however, that the rich have “insatiable desires,” the question that arises is: If the rich have “insatiable desires,” how are they able to *suppress* those (natural?) desires and *curb* their consumption?!
- The rich act on the basis of “their own conveniency”—meaning, presumably, that in acting, they look only to their *own* interests, and are selfish (i.e., keep all of that which they acquire for themselves).
- Despite the fact that, in acting, the rich look only to their own interests, they “are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species.” That is, despite the fact

that the rich act only their *own* interests in mind, because of the operations of an “invisible hand”—i.e., some sort of external force—their actions result in the advance of “the interest of the society.” ([Miracle of miracles!](#))

Unfortunately, Smith failed to make clear —what the *nature* of that “invisible hand” was, nor did he make clear how the *actions* of that invisible hand managed to benefit all members of the society. [5] In effect, we are asked to have *faith* in this mysterious “invisible hand”—without any good reasons being offered as to *why* we should! If that is not a weakness in Smith’s thinking, I don’t know what is!

According to Smith:

When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition. These last too enjoy their share of all that it produces.

“Providence” is, of course, a theological concept, [one definition](#) being:

In [theology](#), **divine providence**, or **providence**, is God's intervention in the world. "Divine Providence" (usually capitalized) is also used as a [title](#) of [God](#). A distinction is usually made between "general providence", which refers to God's continuous upholding the existence and natural order of the [universe](#), and "special providence", which refers to God's extraordinary intervention in the life of people.^[1] Miracles generally fall in the latter category.^[2]

I assume that Smith’s concept of “providence” was of the “general” type—i.e., he thought of “God” in a “[Deistic](#)” sense [6]—so that it was *God’s* “doing” that the earth became divided “among a few lordly masters”—but that God also ensured that *everyone* would “enjoy their share of all that” earth produces.

Although Smith seemed to *claim* that it was *Providence* that provided the “invisible hand,” whose “handiwork” enabled everyone to “enjoy their share of all that” earth produces, in actuality it appears that his thinking was strongly influenced by [Newtonian mechanics](#)—which suggests that for Smith the “invisible hand” was actually something analogous to the *force of gravity*. [7]

[Isaac Newton](#) [1642 – 1727] had publicized his cosmological ideas a few decades prior to the publication of Smith’s [On the Wealth of Nations](#) (1776). Ironically, it has been argued [8]regarding Newton himself that (in 1931, in a paper delivered by Nikolai Bukharin of the Soviet Union in London):

far from being a work of pure scientific scholarship isolated from the social conditions of the time, Newton's experiments, theories and the framework in which they were set—their paradigms therefore, in [Thomas S.] Kuhnian language—had been shaped by the new economic demands of England's rising merchant class.

This suggests that Smith may have sensed that Newtonian mechanics would provide him with a “theoretical” basis that would be useful to the “rising merchant class.” Thus, although Smith’s concept of an “invisible hand” may have been derived *directly* from Newton, the ideas of *both* Newton and Smith may have been “shaped by the new economic demands of England’s rising merchant class”!

At any rate, it has long been recognized that the model that Smith developed reflects Newtonian mechanics (a fact that I elaborated upon in my “[Dissecting Laissez-Faire Thinking](#),” 2011). And it is of interest that George Soros [recently repeated](#) this claim:

Ever since the Crash of 2008 there has been a widespread recognition, both among economists and the general public, that economic theory has failed. But there is no consensus on the causes and the extent of that failure.

I believe that the failure is more profound than generally recognized. It goes back to the foundations of economic theory. Economics tried to model itself on Newtonian physics. It sought to establish universally and timelessly valid laws governing reality. But economics is a social science and there is a fundamental difference between the natural and social sciences. Social phenomena have thinking participants who base their decisions on imperfect knowledge. That is what economic theory has tried to ignore.

But why, more specifically, was it a serious mistake to use Newtonian mechanics as the (tacit) basis for developing the capitalism model? In addressing that question, let me begin by noting that *laissez-faire* is also (i.e., like “free enterprise”) a term closely associated with capitalism, and that such thinking [can be summarized](#) briefly as consisting of the following assumptions:

1. The individual is the basic unit in society.
2. The individual has a natural right to freedom.
3. The physical order of nature is a harmonious and self-regulating system [thereby reflecting Newtonian mechanics].
4. Corporations are creatures of the State and therefore must be watched closely by the citizenry due to their propensity to disrupt the Smithian [spontaneous order](#).

The fourth of these assumptions tends to be ignored nowadays, however; and I would add that “harmonious” should be interpreted as meaning that as individuals pursue their individual interests in a Smithian manner, the result will be that “everyone will ‘enjoy their share of all that’ earth produces.” The capitalist model contains other features, but what I would like to focus on here is the model’s *conclusion*—“everyone will ‘enjoy their share of all that’ earth produces”—and some of the *assumptions* contained (tacitly) in the model—assumptions which, because of their utter lack of *realism*, render that conclusion *invalid*. Meaning that if one were to replace the assumptions contained in the model with ones having realism, the model would “produce” [9] the rotten economic situation that now exists in this country!

Let us, then, identify and comment upon several key assumptions that lie behind Smith's conclusion, assumptions which, because of their lack of realism, can be thought of as "destroying" Smith's conclusion:

1. Not only is the individual the basic unit of the society (society itself being a fiction—at least in the sense of being powerless as an *affecting* agent), [10] but all individuals are the same—in intelligence, skills, interests, "connections," etc. This (tacit) assumption obviously reflects Newtonian mechanics—and is also obviously utterly lacking in realism. There is, then, no reason to believe that in the real world everyone acts in their interests.
2. Individuals vary not only in their "objective" characteristics, but how they *perceive* things—a factor that also plays a role in their behavior, and also has relevance for *whether*, and how *well*, one pursues one's interests.
3. A third flaw in the "theory" is that the "if" in "if individuals pursue their interests" tends to be interpreted in two different—and conflicting—ways:
 - Individuals *do*, in actuality, act in such a manner as to pursue their interests.
 - Individuals *should* act in a manner that advances their interests.

To argue that individuals *do*, in fact, act to advance their interests, is to make a statement that "flies in the face" of how people do, in fact, behave. And to argue that people *should* so act is to make a *normative* judgment that—by its very nature—lacks "truth value."

This last point is worth pursuing. Typically, "pursuing one's own interests" is interpreted as acquiring as much in the way of material goods as one can, and then consuming those goods (but sharing some of one's goods with one's family members [11])—for an assumption of the model is that one's happiness/well-being comes from, and *only* from, the consumption of goods (and services). Thus, to share with others (outside one's immediate family) would be to reduce *one's own* happiness/well-being—and it would be irrational to do so.

That assumption is patently untrue. As has been [said well](#) by Fred Guerin:

We know today, from abundant empirical, sociological, psychological, genetic, archaeological and anthropological evidence, that [Thomas] Hobbes' [1588 – 1679] theory of human nature as intrinsically "selfish" is deeply flawed. We are not "naturally" selfish—though we can, indeed, learn to be so. In other words, within a capitalist system it can become true over the course of time that an elite few will be chiefly oriented by greed, narcissism or selfishness—and some of the latter not so very far from the

"squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinners!" Dickens describes Mr. "Scrooge" as in *A Christmas Carol*.

Given that humans are *actually* [Good Natured](#), insofar as individuals in our society are greedy, aggressive, selfish, etc., this is *partially* because we live in a [large-scale society](#), but *primarily* because our society, having developed in response to Capitalist notions (rather than ones of a religious nature!) gives such characteristics “survival value” (more accurately, “success value”). [12]

It should be clear from the above discussion that capitalism was a mistake; the question that I asked in the title of this essay, however, is whether or not it is a *reversible* mistake. Individuals such as [Thomas Piketty](#) seem to think so, but my response to that is : Dream on! Which means (referring to a statement that I made near the beginning of this essay) that whether one comes to realize the flaws in Capitalist “theory,” and then abandons it, is of little matter, for I have a firm belief that capitalism as a real-world phenomenon is nearing its end.

Here is my reason for writing that (a [statement by John Davies](#)):

The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.

However, Guy McPherson, in [commenting on this statement](#) has said:

He [Davies] considers only atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration, not the many self-reinforcing feedback loops described below [in Guy’s essay].

In the Introduction to his [Going Dark](#) (2013) McPherson had said:

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades.

Two years ago, [McPherson wrote](#): “A decade ago, as I was editing a book on climate change [his *Going Dark* book, I assume], I realized we had triggered events likely to cause human extinction by 2030.” What lends credence to McPherson’s statements is that he is now retired, and can feel free to state what he truly believes.

In conclusion, then, capitalism can be neither replaced nor reformed—for the simple reason that processes are currently in operation that are likely to decimate the human population severely, if not render it extinct. When I wrote my “[Its Later Than You Think](#)” a few months ago, I had a fair amount of optimism, and even provided a link to an article that I had written in 1984 (!) that presented a strategy for societal system change—a strategy which, if it had been implemented, would have meant no ecological crisis today. However, the events that have transpired since

then have led me to the conclusion that there is no hope for us humans now—neither via geo-engineering (“insane,” per Al Gore), nor [finding a “safe” location](#).

Endnotes

1. Fred Guerin [recently stated](#), e.g., that Thomas “Piketty's assumption that we could ever regain control over an "endless inegalitarian spiral” by imposing a progressive tax on capital seems, is at best, rather fanciful.” Guerin was referring here to Piketty’s recent (2014) [Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century](#). That is, Guerin questions Piketty’s assumption that capitalism *can* be reformed.
2. It [has been said](#) that “‘capitalism’ was a word and a phenomenon neither used by, nor known to, **Adam Smith**. Capitalism was a wholly late 19th-century experience. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Vol II, p 863) locates its first usage in English in 1854 by **William Makepeace Thackeray** in his novel, *The Newcomes*.”
3. This particular edition was published in 1984, edited by D. D. Rafael and A. L. Macfie, the quotation occurring on pp. 184 – 184. It’s not clear which of the editions published during Smith’s life was the basis for the Rafael-Macfie edition of the book.
4. In Book IV, Chapter II, paragraph IX of [The Wealth of Nations](#), the “[invisible hand](#)” occurs in this statement: “By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was not part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.”
5. Except for some discussion in Chapter 7 of Book I.
6. [However](#), “Anglo-American economist [Ronald Coase](#) has challenged the view that Smith was a deist, based on the fact that Smith's writings never explicitly invoke God as an explanation of the harmonies of the natural or the human worlds.^[60] According to Coase, though Smith does sometimes refer to the “[Great Architect of the Universe](#)”, later scholars such as [Jacob Viner](#) have “very much exaggerated the extent to which Adam Smith was committed to a belief in a personal God”,^[61] a belief for which Coase finds little evidence in passages such as the one in the *Wealth of Nations* in which Smith writes that the curiosity of mankind about the “great phenomena of nature”, such as “the generation, the life, growth and dissolution of plants and animals”, has led men to “enquire into their causes”, and that “superstition first attempted to satisfy this curiosity, by referring all those wonderful appearances to the immediate agency of the gods. Philosophy afterwards endeavoured to account for them, from more familiar causes, or from such as mankind were better acquainted with than the agency of the gods”.^[61]

A point that I would add here is that Smith's use of "it" in this quotation in referring to Providence seems to suggest that the thought of Providence as a force rather than a divine *Being*.

7. What lends credence to this assertion is Smith's use of the word "it" with reference to Providence (see endnote 6 above).
8. Steven Rose, [*Lifelines: Biology Beyond Determinism*](#), 1998, p. 51.
9. Perhaps with a little additional "tinkering."
10. Put another way, [contextual variables](#) play no role in affecting the behavior of individuals.
11. Given the tacit assumption in Smith's model that only individuals exist, it is "illegal" to bring the "family" into the picture! But we *must*—for the simple reason that if the only social unit is the *individual*, reproduction may or not occur. But if it *does* occur, any children born would receive no care, because it would not be in one's interest to care for children! As a result, the "initial population" would be the *only* population, for all of the members of the initial group would eventually die, and would have no replacements!
12. In an essay that I [wrote two years](#) ago—and in discussing our inequality problem—I argued that the fact that the *family* is our primary societal unit is a major explanatory factor. I would add now that it is the major reason for *most* of our problems—including the fact that capitalism "came on the scene"!

[Sent to Dissident Voice on July 6, 2014.]

Building Bridges, Not Walls

Alton C. Thompson

In the “Class Activities” section of the current [Saudi Aramco World](#), students are told:

Now you’ve had a chance to explore different ways that groups interact with other groups. Some include imbalances of power and an absence of equality; others are more equal (egalitarian) and harmonious. Reviewing what you’ve read, written, and discussed, it’s time to answer The Big Question: *What makes it possible for diverse groups of people to get along with each other and live in harmony?* Present your answers in whatever form best suits you. You can write it, make a video or oral presentation—or anything else you can think of. After all, you’re identifying the building blocks for living together with less conflict—for world peace! Make sure [that] you present them with the importance that they deserve.

Implied here, it seems to me, are the assumptions that (a) it would be important to discover the answer for harmonious living (within and between groups) (b) the students’ elders have not discovered the answer, even though they had had plenty of time to do so!, so that (c) perhaps the “fresh” minds of the young would be able to arrive at an answer (which would then be implemented).

The appearance of the above question in a periodical with ties to [Saudi Arabia](#)—a country known for its [repressive policies](#)—is, of course, highly ironic. (It is *not*, however, ironic that Saudi Arabia is an *ally* of the United States; for despite the stated *aim* of our country to “democratize” the world, our country’s [actual aims are imperialistic](#)—so that it is perfectly understandable why we have countries such as Saudi Arabia and [Israel](#) as our “beloved” allies.) Ignoring the irony involved with the *source* of the above question, and turning to the question itself, the first point that I would make is:

Asking such a question of youth is expecting a great deal from them (!)—and it is doubtful that those students who *are* asked to provide an answer—“in whatever form best suits you”—will arrive at worthwhile answers. After all the life experiences of youth would seem to have little “carry over” value for the world of adults. However, I hope that a future issue publishes some of the answers given, for there might be some valuable ideas in some of those answers.

As to how *I* would answer this question, the first point that I would make is that *group size* is an important factor. Thirty-four years ago Kirkpatrick Sale published his [huge book on the virtues of smallness](#) (!) And more recently British anthropologist Robin Dunbar has argued that a good basis exists for stating that the ideal size of group is about 150 (“[Dunbar’s Number](#)”).

By using the average human brain size and extrapolating from the results of primates, he [Dunbar] proposed that humans can only comfortably maintain 150 stable relationships.^[7] Proponents assert that numbers larger than this generally require more restrictive rules, laws, and enforced norms to maintain a stable, cohesive [group](#). It has been proposed to lie between 100 and 250, with a commonly used value of 150.^{[8][9]} Dunbar's number states the number of people one knows and keeps social contact with, and it does not include the number of people known personally with a ceased social relationship, nor people just generally known with a lack of persistent social relationship, a number which might be much higher and likely depends on [long-term memory](#) size.

Small groups are compatible with harmonious within-group relationships; and one can infer from that fact, regarding *country* size, that:

- As a country grows in size, it develops a more extensive class structure—which implies not only growing inequality in income within the country, but growing domination of the *society itself* by those at the top of the heap.
- Growing domination of the many by the few *within* a society tends to become reflected in the country's *foreign policy*—its *actual* policy, if not its *stated* policy. Thus, it is not surprising that the most evil country on earth, for a number of decades now, is the United States—a fact for which [William Blum](#) has provided an abundance of evidence.

Group size is, of course, not the only obstacle to harmonious relationships at either the intra- or inter-group scale. So are, and have been, race, ethnicity, education, social class, religion, etc. When I think of *youth*, however, and think specifically in terms of my *own* youth, factors such as race, ethnicity, and religion played little role. One made friends with others of one's own *age* and *sex* and *interests* (especially while in secondary school—when there was more opportunity to realize one's wishes), and other factors had little relevance.

I spent my first two years in a [one-room country school](#) in [Mt. Morris, Wisconsin](#), my two-dozen classmates mostly having a Scandinavian heritage, and varying in the ages typical of first-graders through eighth-graders. (The [picture on the cover of this book](#) could have been of the school that I attended.)

Our family then moved to [Wautoma](#), about eight miles from Mt. Morris, and I attended the Waushara County Normal School—a “[normal](#)” school being a teacher-training institution with a “model” classroom. That classroom had a regular teacher (for all eight grades!), but also provided future teachers with an opportunity to hone their teaching skills.

The normal school that I attended was like a one-room country school in its number of primary-school students (*my* class consisting of two girls and me—until one girl moved away!). The student body was slightly more diverse (e.g., ethnically and in religion) than the one in Mt. Morris, but the small number of students meant that there were few, if any, other students of

one's sex—and even age—so that to play with classmates during recess meant that one usually would be playing with others of varying ages, and even sexes.

For most of us this was no problem, for we had siblings (at the time, I had a sister and two brothers—a third one coming along later). The small number of classmates, combined with their varying ages, meant, though, that special rules needed to be followed with some games—such as “[work-up](#)” softball. The *advantage* of such a game, however, was that it fostered harmonious relationships with one's classmates—such that over time one came to regard one's classmates as virtually members of one's own family: The smaller children learned to “look up” (literally *and* figuratively!) to older children, who, in turn, tended to “look after” the younger ones as if they were their own siblings. Granted that my memories might be somewhat idealized, but my point here is that I recall the experience of being in small schools, with very small classes, as a very good one.

Anyone who has come from a large family knows that family life is not all “[peaches and cream](#),” of course. But if the parents are skilled at parenting, disputes that arise among siblings tend to get settled quickly and amicably; and even if parental involvement is minimal, conflicts that arise among siblings tend to “[blow over](#)” rather quickly. Likewise, conflicts that occurred at the country or normal school tended to dissipate quickly, with the older children often taking a parental role relative to the younger children—so that the teacher would not need to do so. (In the normal school, the students learning to be teachers would also often join in with the children's activities, including that of helping to settle disputes.)

When we refocus our attention from the family and country/normal school levels to the *nation* level, that change in “scale” has important implications—with variations in race, education, income, influence, etc., becoming among the factors operating *against* the establishment of harmonious intra-societal relationships. Religion is also a factor that builds a wall between the adults within a society—and often, in today's world, even plays a role in relationships between countries. Let me, then, briefly focus on that factor.

[Sunday Assembly](#) is an organization whose recent development might be regarded as an attempt to “bridge” the differences between the various religions. Its motto is: “It's all the best bits of church, but with no religion, and awesome pop songs!” It also says of itself:

The Sunday Assembly is a global network of people who want to make the most of this one life we know we have.

Our mission: to help everyone find and fulfil their full potential.

Even though Sunday Assembly groups (which have “[meet-ups](#)” rather than “meetings”) *claim* that they are [open to all](#) regardless of religious beliefs (or lack of such), the fact that they call

their “religion” a “[godless](#)” one is not calculated to attract those having a belief in “God” (however defined). Also, the fact that they make it difficult to learn where and when they have their meetings (here in Milwaukee, at least) does not help in attracting members: A friend and I would like to attend one of their “meet-ups” (for the sake of the experience—we have attended the meetings of churches of several “Christian” denominations over the years) but can’t find out where and when there *are* meet-ups close by!

I have my own ideas on a sort of quasi-religious institution that—if it could attract individuals from different religions, including agnostics and atheists—might serve as a bridge between those involved, and contribute to more harmonious relationships. (See [this](#) and [this](#).) However:

- I have neither the means nor the “[moxie](#)” to implement my ideas.
- I have come to believe that our species is headed for extinction—so that there is little *point* in trying to work for more harmonious relationships. (For example, [John Davies](#) wrote last year: “The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.”)

It’s too late in human history, I believe, to ask the question (quoted at the beginning of this essay): “*What makes it possible for diverse groups of people to get along with each other and live in harmony?*”

This is a dismal way to end an essay, but I feel obligated to report what I sincerely believe.

What Would it Take?

Alton C. Thompson

It is no secret that our species is in deep trouble. However, because our major news and opinion media, along with our political (and other) “leaders” have maintained their silence about this fact, few in our society seem to be aware of the trouble that we’re in.

Why this silence? Is it a lack of *knowledge* as to the dangers that face us humans—i.e., is it a matter of *ignorance*, pure and simple? Are those associated with the media and (other) leadership positions so “possessed” by an *ideology* (e.g., [neoliberalism](#)) and its fictional version of Reality that they are simply *unable* to recognize the dire situation that we humans are in? Or is there some other explanation? I suspect that it is the “possession” factor that is operative here, but my interest in this essay is *other* than elaborating on that possibility.

As the title of my essay suggests, my *primary* interest in this essay is the *characteristics* that would need to prevail in our and other societies for there to be an *absence* of the threats currently facing us humans. This implies that my primary focus is *not*, then, on the questions:

- What *can* be done to address the problems that face us?
- What *should* be done?

Given the primary focus of this essay, a useful starting point is to note the major problems facing us humans at present. These have been succinctly stated by [Guy McPherson](#). In the Introduction to his [Going Dark](#) (2013) he lists the following:

- “global climate change”
- “environmental collapse”
- “nuclear meltdown”

As his last point especially needs clarification, let me quote here what McPherson says about this matter:

Safely shuttering a nuclear power plant requires a decade or two of careful planning. Far sooner, we’ll complete the ongoing collapse of the industrial economy. This is a source of my nuclear nightmares.

When the world's 440 or so nuclear power plants melt down catastrophically, we've entered an extinction event. Think clusterfukushima [see [this](#)], raised to the power of a hundred or so. Ionizing radiation could, and probably will, destroy most terrestrial organisms and, therefore, most marine and freshwater organisms. That, by the way includes the most unique, special, intelligent animal on Earth [i.e., us!]

I assume that McPherson, in referring to humans as the “most intelligent animal,” did so “[tongue in cheek](#),” for he later says:

Again, I invoke the wisdom of George Carlin: “When you're born into this world, you're given a ticket to the freak show. If you're born in America you get a front row seat.” [!]

[Paul Craig Roberts](#) would add to McPherson's list that we are [faced with the threat of nuclear annihilation](#) via the use of nuclear warheads:

Washington believes that it can win a nuclear war with little or no damage to the US. This belief makes nuclear war likely.

As Steven Starr [author of “[The Lethality of Nuclear Weapons](#)”] makes clear, this belief is based in ignorance. Nuclear war has no winner. Even if US cities were saved from retaliation by ABMs, the radiation and nuclear winter effects of the weapons that hit Russia and China would destroy the US as well.

The above-mentioned threats are not the only problems facing us humans at present, of course, but they are the ones that should take “center stage,” given that they threaten our continued existence as a species.

This brings me, then, to the question contained in the title of this essay—“what would it take” *not* to be faced with these threats to our continued existence? That is, what *characteristics* would our society, and other societies, need to have for all of us to feel relatively “safe” from the possibility of premature deaths?

For me, the sorts of necessary characteristics were possessed by the [Plains Indians](#) (using that term rather than “indigenous people” or “native Americans”—because many Indians refer to themselves as “Indians”!). My interest in Indians goes back to my primary school days, when one of my favorite books in our “[normal school](#)” library was an illustrated book about Indian chiefs and other leaders. Although, in having a Norwegian-Swedish heritage, I suppose that my heroes *should* have been, and be, the [Vikings](#) (but *not* a [Minnesota Vikings](#), of course, being a *Wisconsin* native! [1]), as one raised in Christianity, and who used to sing “[Jesus loves the little children](#)” as a child (with its “red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight”), I have felt much more comfortable with Indian values than with Viking ones.

At any rate, I associate the following characteristics with the Plains Indians (before they were displaced by whites—“displaced” being a euphemism for “killed”!)—characteristics which, I believe, virtually *prevented* them from being in the situation that now faces all of us humans:

1. They had a way of life that involved continuous *contact* with Earth.
2. Their way of life involved *dependence* on Earth—a fact of which the members of these societies were acutely aware.
3. Given their dependence on Earth for their livelihood, in conjunction with their continuous contact with Earth, it is unsurprising that they came to perceive the various components of their environment as *sacred*.

In not being able to *explain* the existence of those components, but in desiring to *have* one, it is unsurprising that they invented an Unseen Force (i.e., Great Spirit, Creator, etc.) as the explanatory factor. An *effect* in so doing, of course, was to *reinforce* their perception of the various components of Earth as sacred.[2]

4. Given their *awareness* of their dependence on Earth for their very lives, and the *reverence* that they developed for Earth, it is understandable that their *actions* relative to the components of Earth *reflected* their perception of Earth. That is, despoiling Earth, taking more than they needed, etc., were *unthinkable* to them—because such actions would insult the Great Spirit.
5. Their way of life fostered a feeling of being *a part of* Earth, rather than being *apart from* it. They therefore never developed a mentality favorable to the development of technology—which, tends not only to “feed upon itself,” but, in doing so, tends to result in changes in way of life that [further result in feeling apart from Earth](#), thereby, in turn, resulting in unecological behavior relative to Earth that eventually poses a threat to many species, including our own.
6. The *social* unit of importance to them was one “higher” than what we today know as the “nuclear family,” being the particular *group* to which they belonged. Given this, it is understandable why they tended to regard the other members of their group as their equals. “Out-group” individuals might be regarded with suspicion and as inferior, so that contact with such individuals might result in their mistreatment. “In-group” individuals, however, would be regarded as “family,” and treated as such. (For additional negative comments regarding family relative to a larger societal unit, see [this essay](#).)
7. In any *family* the individuals comprising the family vary in their characteristics—although this is more true for some families than for other ones. If the members of a

larger group—e.g., a Plains Indian tribe—think of themselves as belonging to a “family” of sorts, this is advantageous to the group; for the individual members can use their various abilities to serve the needs of the group, while engaged in cooperative, coordinated activities. With all members of the group *identifying* with the group, there is little basis for psychological problems and deviant behavior—whether with reference to others in the group or Earth.

8. They developed *rituals* which increased their feeling of connectedness, both with reference to one another and with Earth.

Granted that I may have idealized Plains Indian life somewhat in the above discussion, but I believe that the points made above are *essentially* correct. It seems clear to me that their *having* these characteristics is what made them “safe” from the threat that *we* now face from global warming (among other threats); and it follows, logically, from the above discussion that **it is fact that our society (and most other societies as well) lacks these characteristics at present—all of them—that puts us in danger.**

“Eagle Man” Ed McGaa, in his [*Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and our World*](#) (1990—a time when our problems were not so acute!); also [see this](#)—seemingly suggests to the reader that *if* we (USans in particular [3] would adopt Indian ceremonies, we could get “[out of the woods](#).” He therefore devotes the nine chapters of Part II (“Earth: The Seven Mother Earth Ceremonies”) to discussing Indian ceremonies, and the four chapters of Part III (“Air: Bringing Forth Your Own Mother Earth Wisdom”) to topics such as “building a sweat lodge.”

One would like to believe that McGaa’s suggestions had merit, but I am convinced that:

- It would take far more than the adoption of the ceremonies that he suggests for us to get “out of the woods.”
- The likelihood that his advice will be *heeded* by many is close to 0 (i.e., zero).
- Insofar far as it would be a good idea to adopt ceremonies, I see no point in adopting ceremonies from the Indians. What would make sense, rather, is developing *our own* ceremonies, ones that would be meaningful to *us*.

Frankly, I can’t imagine that McGaa would have written this book in 2014—assuming, that is, that he is aware of what some scientists are saying about our probable future. For example, Guy McPherson, in the Introduction to his [*Going Dark*](#) (2013) states:

Shortly after the arrival of the 21st century I realized we were putting the finishing touches on our own extinction party, with the shindig probably over within a few decades. [[Elsewhere](#) he wrote that he expected our species to be extinct by 2030.]

Now if it's *extinction* that lies in our future, there would seem to be little point in trying *prevent* it, or act to *adapt* to the changes that will be inevitably occurring. What, then, *should* we do? McPherson's answer is that "[only love remains](#)"—and that may be not only the *best* answer, but the *only* one!

Endnotes

1. As a Wisconsin native, I am "naturally" a [Green Bay Packers](#) fan. Besides, the fact that the helmets of the Minnesota Vikings depict a Viking helmet with horns—despite the fact that there is [no evidence that the Vikings ever had horned helmets](#)—proves that Minnesotans are ignorant people! (A case of inter-state rivalry—but just in jest, of course!)
2. I find it of interest that they perceived this Unseen Force in *unitary* terms—i.e., in *monotheistic* rather than *polytheistic* terms. What may have accounted for their monotheism is the fact that their environment was dominated by just one element, the sun.
3. The "US" in "USan" refers to the United States. To use the term "American" to refer only to those of us who live in the United States, is arrogantly to ignore the fact that there is a North, Central, and South America, whose residents would like to be considered "real" people as well!

[It is currently 6:20 AM on July 19, 2014, and in going to Guy's site, I have discovered that there are now 64 comments to (ostensibly!) this essay. Yesterday I read or skimmed all of the essays then posted, and—unsurprisingly—concluded that *no one* who had offered comments had understood the point of my essay. Stated briefly, what I was trying to convey was:

1. Let's assume that the societal characteristics that I listed (which I had attributed to the Plains Indians) were among—mostly if not entirely—the characteristics—if possessed by most, if not all societies—necessary to prevent the dangerous situation we humans are now in from arising.
2. Given those assumptions, it's clear that *our* society (and most other "developed" ones as well) *lacks* those characteristics.
3. It should be obvious that our and other societies will *not* acquire many—if any—of those characteristics soon.
4. Therefore, we are doomed.

I share Guy's conviction that we are doomed, and believe it important to recognize *why* that is so—so that one can then redirect one's life (to one of, e.g., love, as Guy has recommended). My purpose in writing this essay was to convince the reader that we are, in fact, doomed—and it's apparent that I failed! That fact disappoints me!

Granted that I did not state my purpose *explicitly* in the essay. Given the “thrust” of Guy’s site, however—the fact of its orientation to NTE (near-term extinction), any reader with a modicum of intelligence, and a basic ability to engage in inferential reasoning, should have been able to conclude what my purpose was—i.e., the purpose that I stated above.

The four points that I list above do not appear in the essay, of course. My assumption in writing the essay, however, is that I was not writing for morons who needed to be spoon fed but, rather, for people (a) having a certain degree of intelligence and education who also (b) happen to agree with Guy that our species is headed for extinction.

The eight points that I listed, and attributed to the Plains Indians, were only so attributed as a matter of convenience—and with some basis in reality. My main point here was to list those characteristics that **societies** *per se*—whether Plains Indians or whatever—would need to have to be “safe” from the ravages named in my essay. Thus, I regard comments that understood those points as referring *only* and *specifically* to Plains Indians as *missing the point*—especially given my assumption that people going to Guy’s site know in advance its orientation to our likely NTE. The “obvious” purpose of my listing those eight points was to identify the characteristics of a society that would not be facing the threat of NTE.

Once an individual agrees with those points, if that person has half a brain s/he will realize that most societies today lack most, if not all, of those characteristics—and that it follows from that fact that we are doomed. My purpose in listing the eight points, then, was to help *solidify* in the reader’s mind that we humans are doomed. Guy has provided an abundance of scientific evidence that supports this conclusion, and my purpose was to provide a different sort of evidence that would *complement* that scientific evidence, thereby adding further weight to the conclusion that we are doomed.

The reason that I regard *that* of importance is that in being *fully* convinced of our dire situation one might be able to muster the psychological strength to re-orient one’s life. I realize that such re-orientation is a difficult thing for most people to do, and my hope was that *understanding* my purpose in listing the eight points would help in that re-orientation process.

It appears to me that most of those who make comments to essays on Guy’s site are (a) themselves incapable of writing essays worthy of being posted and (b) basically clueless individuals who do not read the essays they comment on closely, and also lack an ability to offer worthwhile comments. This is *not* to say, however, that *all* of those who go to Guy’s site have these attributes, just those who offer *comments*.]

July 13, 2014

[The following short essay was written this morning. Then, after watching [Becket](#) this afternoon, I decided to type it, and enter it into Vol. VI of my collection of essays. By the way, the acting in that movie by Richard Burton and (especially) Peter O'Toole is suburb (as is *all* of the acting, actually), and the dialogue given to both Burton and O'Toole is brilliant.

The movie also reminds me of this passage from [Matthew 27](#):

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

For just as the Roman soldiers are said to have mocked Jesus prior to crucifying him, so has [Christianity—Roman Catholicism](#) in particular—been a mockery of an *enlightened* interpretation of the [Christian Bible](#). In the early years of (what I like to call) "Jesuanism," considerable diversity existed, and it's likely that at least some of those strands carried forward an enlightened version (or versions—given that different individuals can be expected to have differing interpretations) of the Bible. With the emperor [Constantine I](#) [272 – 337 CE], however, the Movement became politicized, with the "orthodox" part of the Movement—with its [Nicene Creed](#)—receiving favor. Given that that strand of the Movement favored *orthodoxy* over *orthopraxy*, it was clearly "[heretical](#)"—yet later (under [Theodosius I](#) [347 -395 CE]) was made the official religion of the Roman Empire! And we have suffered from that fact ever since!

Of today's versions of "Christianity," I think of the [Society of Friends](#) ("Quakers") as best expressing the "thrust" of an enlightened interpretation of the Bible—but think NeWFism (were it to exist, that is!) does so even better!

Some Current Thoughts Regarding the NeWF

I have discussed the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) at length in [What Are Churches For?](#) (August 14, 2011)—in which I used the term "Structured Interaction Group" (SIG) for the institution—and [Addressing our Uncertain Future](#) (January 7, 2014), and more briefly in [Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#) (October 9, 2007), [An Alternative to Church](#) (March 18, 2011), [A Religion for Today](#) (May 25, 2013), and [NeWFism and the Tradition](#) (March 10, 2014). In addition, I have referred to the NeWF in many of my shorter essays. The current essay gives

my *current* thinking about the NeWF; insofar as there are any discrepancies between what I write in this essay and had written in previous works, what I write herein takes precedence over what I wrote previously.

With those prefatory remarks out of the way, the first point that I wish to make here is that the NeW Word Fellowship (NeWF) gains its name from the fact that the participants in a given NeWF would expect—frequently, if not during all meetings—to gain *new ideas* during the course of their meetings/sessions. These new ideas might be thought of as “inspirations,” “revelations,” etc.—with different members conceiving them in different ways, this fact being not only *expected* but *desirable*.

The *reason* for this variation is that different members would have different views as to the *source* of the new ideas—with some attributing the new ideas to the natural workings of the human mind, some to an undefined Higher Power, some to “God” (conceived in a variety of ways—conceivably!), etc.

What this suggests is that some participants in a NeWF will regard it as a *secular* institution, some a *religious* one. And regarding those who take the position that a NeWF is a religious institution, some will perceive the NeWF as the centerpiece of a new religion—i.e., *NeWFism*—and others will perceive the NeWF simply as an “add-on” to an existing religion—whether “Christian” or other. For the latter people, a NeWF session would occur at a different time and place than the church “service.” (NeWF sessions might occur in the church *building*, but would not occur in the church’s “sanctuary,” given that the seating arrangement of that part of the building would not meet the seating needs of a NeWF.)

The “inspiration” that I perceive associated with (many) NeWF sessions would involve more than new ideas, I believe. The achievement of new ideas will often, I believe, be accompanied by a “high”—especially by the one to whom the new idea came, but by many, if not all, of the others as well. Why? Because they recognize that the new idea is not merely a *new* idea, but is an idea that they perceive as having *value* in some sense.

Achieving a “high” would *itself* have implications—would, that is, be more than just a “nice experience.” First, I suspect that those achieving a “high” would be able to shed—at least temporarily, and perhaps permanently with time—any ideology (e.g., neoliberalism, Zionism) that “possessed” their minds.

Second, those who achieve a “high” will, I believe, find that the way they *perceive* the people and things (natural things in particular?) around them differs from when they are in a state of “normal consciousness.” In fact, the word “sacred” might be appropriate for this new way of perceiving Reality.

This new way of perceiving would involve (a) perceiving differences in *kind* rather than *degree*—so that there would be, e.g., no “better” and “worse”: Everything would, therefore, be

regarded as of *equal value*. That fact would, of course, have behavioral implications—in that while in that state of mind one will show *respect*, and even *love*, for the people and things around oneself. Given that we live in a world of “instant communication,” an implication here is that one will show respect and love not only for the people with whom one *interacts* on a daily basis, but those about whom one *learns* via the media—especially those internet media that provide accurate information, rather than mere propaganda.

Ritual would play a significant role in a NeWF in that its use would help bring the above-discussed effects into being. The following is the ritual associated with a NeWF; the fact that:

- Groups are formed using a ritualistic procedure.
- A group’s “leader” is selected in a ritualistic manner.
- Discussion is controlled by certain rules—which can be perceived as of a ritualistic nature.
- Members of a given NeWF sit in a circle.
- A lit candle is placed (e.g., on a stand) at the center of each group. The meaning of this will vary from person to person, with some perceiving its relationship to ideas—the facts that ideas are *intangible*, but *real* (like the flame); and with others (also or only) perceiving the flame as symbolizing the *source* of the new ideas that are anticipated during sessions—e.g., a Higher Power, “God,” etc.

It is entirely possible, of course, that a given NeWF will create *additional* rituals for its own use—ones that are meaningful to them. And it’s also possible that an *organizational structure* will develop that will act as an “umbrella” for a number of NeWFs located in close proximity. That is, a denomination, or denominations, may very well form!

If, that is, there are any survivors to the catastrophe that will soon overtake us—and those survivors happen to be NeWF people!

[Insofar as this essay lacks in literary elegance, I blame my back pain. When I got out of bed on Monday, May 5, I had severe back pain. In having X-rays taken, it was found that I had a compression fracture of the L2 vertebrae. My doctor gave me some pain medicine, which has run out, that helped somewhat, but I continue to have back pain—which affects my mental state.]

Thanks for the Comments!

Alton C. Thompson

My recently-posted “[What Would It Take?](#)” essay lacks a *statement of purpose*. As I have reflected on *why* it lacks one, I have come to conclude that the essay was a product of my *unconscious* mind! In having that origin, I have also come to conclude that my unconscious mind had “informed” me that such a *purpose* statement would be unnecessary because the reader would be able to *infer* the essay’s purpose during the process of his or her *reading* of the essay:

- From the *contents* of the essay itself, in conjunction with
- The fact of its having been posted on a web site with an orientation to the probability of near-term extinction (NTE) for our species.

However, in reading the comments (77 at the time of this writing) on the essay, I sensed that virtually *no one*—of those who had commented on the essay, at least—“got” my purpose in writing the essay. Realization of *that* “fact” took me aback, and made me wonder *why* it might be so.

In reflecting on the matter over a couple of days, it finally “dawned” on me that when I wrote the essay, I had *lacked* a *conscious* purpose! **I had written the essay without a clear, explicit purpose in mind! Shame on me! Me bad!**

In coming to recognize *that* fact, I realized that it had been *presumptuous* of me (my *unconscious mind*, actually!) to expect any reader to be able to infer my purpose, given the likelihood that the essay contained too few “clues” in it to enable a reader to *discern* its purpose! Put another way, I came to realize that my *initial* reaction to the comments had been of a “blame the reader” (a variation on the theme of “[blame the victim](#)”) nature, whereas I *should* have been blaming *myself* for readers not “getting” my purpose in writing the essay!

In reaching *that* conclusion, my initial *negative* reaction to the comments changed to one of a more *neutral* nature.

Once I reached the conclusion that I had written the essay without a clear—and fully *conscious*—purpose in mind, it occurred to me that it was *incumbent* upon me to *try* to “figure out” *what* my purpose *must* have been—and to then *report* that purpose in a separate essay (the current one).

After thinking about the matter for a few days, I have been able to discover *what*, I believe now, my purpose was in writing the essay, and below I state the thinking that, I now think, *may* have been behind the essay—thinking of which I lacked conscious awareness when I *wrote* the essay.

I need to add here that my cogitation regarding the essay's purpose not only resulted in my arriving at conclusions as to the essay's (likely) purpose, but recognition, on my part, that what had *motivated* this search process was the *comments* made on my essay. Initially I had reacted *negatively* to those comments, but in my eventually coming to realize that they motivated me to discover *why* I had written the essay—a purpose that I am *glad* that I discovered!—I *now* perceive those comments in a very *positive* light. Which explains the title that I chose for this essay—“Thanks for the Comments!” And please excuse me for my initial “blame the reader” reaction to the comments! I make no claims to be perfect!

In offering a presentation here of the *likely* purpose that was behind the writing of “What Would It Take?,” I believe that a useful starting point here is to recognize that Guy's “[Climate-change summary and update](#)” (updated most recently on July 20—yesterday!) gives reasons for anticipating the imminent demise of our species based on *recent scientific research*.

What seems to have occurred in my unconscious mind was a recognition of the desirability (*why* I will comment on shortly) of having *more than one* basis for anticipating our near-term extinction. It seems to have occurred to my unconscious mind that another “building block” in an argument in support of our “[uncertain](#)” future would be a set of (as I had stated in my earlier essay) “*characteristics* that would need to prevail in our and other societies for there to be an *absence* of the threats currently facing us humans.”

In the earlier essay I listed eight (8) characteristics, and stated that I associated those characteristics with the Plains Indians (prior to their virtual elimination by “us” whites). I may or may not have been correct in making such an attribution; but the *principal* point that I had wished to make (I believe now) in listing the eight characteristics was *not* so much to associate them with a group of Indians *per se* but, rather, to assert that *if* all, or most, societies had most, if not all, of those characteristics, the humans in them would likely *not* face the threats to our continued existence as humans that we humans now face.

What my unconscious was trying to “tell” me (I now believe) is that it would be of value to *reinforce* the *scientific* evidence that Guy had provided in his “Climate-change summary and update” essay with another set of reasons to believe in NTE.

This conclusion suggest two questions:

- Why think of my “list of eight” as constituting “reasons”?
- Why believe it desirable to *reinforce* the scientific evidence provided by Guy?

I would now answer the *first* question by stating baldly that my “list of eight” does *not* actually constitute a set of “reasons.” Rather, the statements in that list are best thought of as *part* of an *argument*—one which I will be stating shortly.

As to the *second* question, the first point that I would make is that I now believe that Guy himself believes—at an unconscious level, at least!—in the importance of reinforcement. Guy’s forthcoming book—[*Extinction Dialogs: How to Live with Death in Mind*](#)—can, I believe, be thought of as an (unconscious) attempt to reinforce the argument made in his “Climate-change summary and update” essay. Granted that both focus (I assume this regarding the forthcoming book) on *scientific* evidence in support of Guy’s thesis, but the book, in using an *interview format*, can be thought of as an *additional* “building block” in an argument in support of his NTE thesis—one that will serve to *reinforce* his thesis.

Why is it of importance to have *three* such “building blocks” (i.e., his two, and mine—with the possibility that others will provide still more)? In addressing this question, let me begin by stating the argument that I now believe is *implicit* in my “What Would It Take?”:

1. Let’s assume that the societal characteristics that I listed (which I had attributed—rightly or not—to the Plains Indians) were among—mostly if not entirely—the characteristics that—if possessed by *most*, if not *all* societies—were *necessary* to prevent, from arising, the dangerous situation we humans are now in.
2. Given those assumptions, it’s clear that *our* society (and most *other* “developed” ones today as well) *lacks* those characteristics.
3. It should be obvious that—given our “[Neanderthal](#)” “leaders—our and other societies will *not* acquire many—if *any*—of those characteristics any time soon.
4. *Therefore*, it follows logically (does it not?) that we are doomed.

Now if one adds to my point one (!) the evidence provided by Guy in his “Climate-change summary and update,” along with the evidence—provided in a *different format*—likely to be presented in his forthcoming *Extinction Dialogs* book, one will have a *number* of *reasons* to accept the thesis that our species is doomed.

Why is that of importance? In having a *number* of *reasons* for accepting this thesis one has no excuse for *not accepting it*. Therefore, one is *obligated* to accept it!

Now if one is *obligated* to accept the thesis, and then *does* accept it, this will necessarily cause one to *re-orient* one’s life.

How one does so will vary from person to person, of those who come to accept Guy’s thesis. Some will argue (on a solid basis!) that we cannot know the future with certainty, and therefore

one should engage in *pre-adaptive* efforts—given the possibility that *some* parts of the world may remain habitable by humans (an [argument made by Geoffrey Chia](#)). (Also see my “[It’s Later Than You Think](#)” for my thoughts on possible survival.)

Others will accept Guy’s conclusion that we are doomed, and therefore also accept his conclusion that our *only* choice now is to *accept* that fact, and then begin *re-orienting* our lives. Guy’s conclusion is that one should henceforth resolve to try always to [interact with others in a loving manner](#)—a conclusion with which it is difficult to disagree (although it’s certainly possible that some would have *other* ideas).

It’s probably a good thing that at least some in our midst are fully aware of our precarious situation at present, but also have enough optimism to see a basis for *hope*—and who then *act* on that perception. For is it not in the realm of *possibility* that some brilliant ideas will arise with some that, in being somehow implemented, enable our “salvation”? (By “somehow,” I am most certainly *not* referring to actions authorized and implemented by our supposed “leaders”!)

Again, let me express my heartfelt thanks to those who have written comments on my “What Would It Take?” essay. I could not have written the *current* essay without their comments!

A Case of Academic Schizophrenia?

Alton C. Thompson

Combined also with *ignorance?*, I would add. What I'm referring to here is two passages in [*The Neanderthals Rediscovered: How Modern Science is Rewriting Their Story*](#) (2013), by Dimitra Papagianni (who received her Ph. D. in Archeology from the University of Cambridge) and Michael A. Morse (whose Ph. D. is in History, from the University of Chicago).

The passages in question (both from successive paragraphs on p. 22):

Passage I

We cannot help but wonder: were it not for our own advances, would the Neanderthals have colonized the rest of the planet, replacing holdovers of more archaic species? Would they have accomplished all the things that modern humans have done—agriculture and architecture, states and warfare, science and psychoanalysis?

Passage II

In a strange sense, the price [that] we have paid for our knowledge of the Neanderthals—or at least for the civilization that has enabled us to learn about the deep past—is the very stability that has got us this far. Our world is about to be shaken by another major change in climate [the “another” here alluding to the fact that there have been *five* major periods of extinction through geologic time, with us currently being in the “[Sixth Extinction](#)”]. If we suffer a significant jump in warming, as we almost certainly will over the next few generations, or if we experience a new glaciation, which will surely come unless global warming somehow delays its arrival, our survival as a species may hang in the balance.

First, evidence for possible schizophrenia in these passages:

1. In the *second* passage the authors state their belief that “Our world is about to be shaken by another major change in climate” In the *first* passage, however, they refer to “our own advances” and what we moderns “have accomplished,” giving as examples “states and warfare.” I have two comments to make about what they say about our “advances/accomplishments”:
 - a. Why on earth would any *sane* person regard warfare as an “accomplishment” of us moderns?!

- b. The authors explicitly recognize the dire situation that we humans face at present (in terms of *global warming*, at any rate), and in referring to our “advances/accomplishments” seemingly suggest that modernity is an unqualified “good.” Given, however, that in the *second* passage they clearly recognize the threat posed by global warming, they provide us with clear evidence that their thinking is schizophrenic (as I try to make clear in point 3 below).
2. The authors don’t seem to recognize that societies are *systems*, and as such are a “package deal” (as Philip E. Slater in effect stated, relative to *cultural systems* specifically, in {p. 100} his utterly brilliant [The Pursuit of Loneliness](#), 1970). A given society may, then, contain both positive *and* negative aspects—this being especially true after our “Fall” (as Warren Johnson put it on p. 43 of the 1979 Shambhala edition of [Muddling Toward Frugality](#)) into agriculture about 10,000 YBP (i.e., after the [Agricultural “Revolution”](#)). (Note that the use of the word “revolution” here has *positive* connotations—indicating our proclivity for continual self-deception on a massive scale.)
3. In not recognizing *that* fact (i.e., the “package deal” one), the authors fail to realize that our *current* societal systems—with all of their “advances” and “accomplishments”—are the very *reason* (!) why we are in our current dire situation. What has *enabled* us humans to “achieve” our present “advanced” situation is the discovery that coal, and then petroleum/natural gas, could serve as sources of energy. However, the *use* of those sources of energy has *also* resulted in a build-up of “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere, which build-up has given us the various deleterious phenomena associated with global warming! Given that virtually *everyone* in our society is schizophrenic regarding the matter of how “wonderful” civilization is, is it any wonder that the authors of *The Neanderthals Rediscovered* are “possessed” by this fantasy?! (My recently-posted [“What Would It Take?”](#) also has relevance relative to this matter.)

Next, the matter of possible ignorance demonstrated in these passages:

1. The authors are correct in asserting that we humans are on the verge of experiencing a “significant jump in warming” (suggesting that they are referring to [“runaway” climate change](#)). However, they don’t seem to realize that global warming is a *multi-dimensional* phenomenon—one that involves not just warming (with its possible “jump” soon—assuming that it has not already begun!), but also (a) an increase in the *number* of storms, an (b) increase in their *severity*, and (c) increased *variability* in atmospheric conditions at any given location (so that *predictability* becomes a serious problem)—with, though the *degree* of variability varying from place to place, of course.
2. The authors state that there will be a “jump” in warming “almost certainly . . . over the next few generations . . .” John Davies and Guy McPherson would disagree with their

use of the word “generations” here, [Davies having declared](#) it likely that our species will be extinct before 2040, [McPherson saying](#) before 2030. Personally, I think it ludicrous to believe otherwise: Just because only a *few* scientists, such as Davies and McPherson, are willing to speak boldly about our probable future is no indication that *most* climate scientists are not in virtual agreement with Davies and McPherson that our “days are numbered.”

3. The authors refer to experiencing a “new glaciation.” It’s true that we are near the “theoretical” [end of an interglacial period](#) (termed the “[Holocene](#)”), so that if humans—“modern” ones in particular—were not present on Earth, it’s likely that a new ice age would begin in the near future (“near” here in terms of *geological* time). However, what makes such an event unlikely (for a “long” time) is that our burning of fossil fuels, especially since about 1850 CE, has resulted in global warming. Thus, there is not only increased warming and associated phenomena (e.g., drought and resulting “wildfires”), but those phenomena—along with others identified by the likes of [Guy McPherson](#) and [Paul Craig Roberts](#)—seem likely to “do us humans in” within a matter of decades, if not years.

Given the above three points, my suggestion to the authors is that they stick with their specialties, Archeology and History!

Our Crazy Unreal World

Alton C. Thompson

The paradox today is that the real *intellectual* world that we are living in differs substantially from the real *physical* world that we live in—something that is by no means a “good thing”! A “[decatalogue](#)” of examples that occur to me at the moment (limited to ones relating to [global warming](#)):

- Youth planning for careers that, if begun, will likely have a short life.
- Related to this, technical schools advertising, on television, programs to attract students, promising them with well-compensated and exciting careers in technical fields—likely to disappear in a matter of decades, if not years (because of a lack of *market* for those jobs, to say nothing of a lack of *people* to fill them!).
- Companies anticipating significant *growth* in the near future, and therefore developing grand building plans—for buildings likely to be basically, if not entirely, vacant in a few decades, or even years.
- Companies working on developing *new products* for introduction next year, the business leaders associated with those companies not realizing that they will be running out of “next years” before they know it.
- Governments interpreting “security” in a way that results in their concluding, and then actin on, the notion that military preparedness and adventurism will provide the desired security—totally oblivious to the fact that not only are their policies and actions misguided from a here-and-now standpoint, but *totally* “out of whack” so far as the future is concerned.
- Churches preaching “salvation” in a supposed “[sweet by an by](#),” unaware of the fact that *most*, if not *all*, of us—of *all ages*, including the very young—will be meeting the “[grim reaper](#)” in a relatively short while, with little likelihood of an “afterlife” (or, perhaps, a [totally unexpected](#) one).
- Unusual weather conditions—e.g., severe drought, and consequent “[wildfires](#)” on a massive scale—commented on by weather reporters, and either not explained, or “explained” by, e.g., referring to changes in the course of the [jet stream](#). *Why* that

change? One never hears such reporters attribute that change to *global warming*, does one? Why not? Likely because the *sponsors* of their programs don't want weather reporters to "scare" viewers, and therefore hold back on their spending; therefore, they insist that reporters of the weather make no reference to the subject—making the reporters intellectual prostitutes of the highest order.

- Science "intellectuals" using complex arguments to the effect that we need a [new way of thinking](#), one which will "save" us—as if there is *time* to engage in salvific actions!
- The fact that when one mentions the possibility of near-term extinction to another during the course of a conversation, "nine times out of ten" the other will discount that possibility—unwilling to accept the fact that *sound science* lies behind such a projection.
- The fact that those few in our society who *do* have concerns about the future tend to believe that "[going green](#)" is the answer. That is, if one makes a few minor changes in one's lifestyle, one will be doing one's part in "saving our world"—an attitude that is not only utterly foolish, but which reflects the [individualism](#) that is at the root of so many of our problems. Those convinced that "going green" at least have *some* inkling that we are in deep trouble, but how does one explain the objections to "[wind farms](#)" that have been expressed by some dolts in our society?!

In our society there is a general obsession with the here-and-now, and the little thought that *is* given to the future (e.g., by the "green" crowd) tends to be of an utterly unrealistic nature. Even if it is one's *own life* that is involved, one tends not to think about future implications of present activities (e.g., cigarette smoking)!

Likely a psychologist could explain these intellectual and related tendencies in our society, but what would be the *value* of such an explanation? How would it be *useful*? The point is that we are living in a highly dangerous situation today, and there appears to be "[no way out](#)"—so that attempts at *understanding* our situation would be pointless exercises.

For those of us who recognize that the "future has no future" (!), living in this unreal world that we have made for ourselves is a difficult matter! Guy McPherson is likely right in his declaration that "[only love remains](#)." But surely even *he* realizes that it is exceedingly difficult to put our existing unreal situation out of mind, making it difficult for us to follow the "[love command](#)":

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'^[a] ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your mind and with all your strength.’^[b] ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[c] There is no commandment greater than these.”

(Actually, there is just *one* commandment in “Holy Scripture,” given that God is not a Being out there some place but, rather, “[God is love](#)”!)

My view is that in our developing agriculture millennia ago (i.e., the [Agricultural “Revolution”](#)) we “[ate the forbidden fruit](#)” (or, put another way, opened “[Pandora’s Box](#)”). That is, we unwittingly—and *that* is the tragedy!—unleashed forces that have not only put us humans on a path likely to lead to our demise as a species, but one that has “blessed” us with a mentality such that (a) most find it impossible to *recognize* that fact, thereby (b) virtually ensuring that nothing of significance has been (and now even *can* be) done to “[stem the tide](#)”—(c) *thereby*, in turn, quite possibly resulting in our *disappearance* from earth during this “[sixth extinction](#)” period of geologic time.

Whoever it was who first asserted that humans are the [most intelligent of all animals](#) thereby demonstrated his (for it likely *was* a man!) utter *lack* of intelligence!

What *Might* Have Been

Alton C. Thompson

In my recent “[It’s Later Than You Think \(ACT II \[1\]\)](#)” I stated that it is “our *modern way of life* that is *directly* responsible for our current perilous situation.” In then speculating on *why* our modern way of life had *developed*, I declared: “My answer to the question of why our current way of life developed is that the *nature of our thinking* has been flawed for some time in various ways”—and I then went on to list 10 ways. I referred to modern thinking as *Modern Mode* (MD) thinking, and went on to speculatively explain its existence by noting that *my own* thinking

has been affected strongly by Morris Berman’s [Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline](#) (2011), in which he argues for the central role that “economic liberalism”—with its orientation to so-called “free markets”—has played in our society, a mode of thinking that Berman traces back to the sixteenth century. With Berman, I would argue that such thinking has played a dominant role in our society—a far greater role in our society than, e.g., Christianity (which has tended merely to *adapt* itself to the society, rather than being a force for societal system change—except at [rare times](#)).

Because “economic liberalism” has played such a strong role in our society, it is understandable that the dominant “drives” in our society are for (a) wealth, (b) power, and (c) fame—with some in our society being driven by just one of these goals, others, by two of them, and still others by all three.

I then went on to state that:

Why economic liberalism itself has grown to dominance—and given us MD thinking—is a question worth pursuing, I suppose, but doing so here would carry me too far afield from my principal objectives here.

Which I then listed, and discussed.

I would *now* assert, however, that the *institutional situation* in this country has played a huge role in the coming to dominance of MD thinking. Of course, a complex *interaction* has occurred in our society in the development of our institutional situation and MD thinking, with each being both a *cause*, and a *consequence*, of the other. Still, our “institutional situation” *can* be usefully isolated from this system, and I do so here.

In my earlier “[Why Our Society Has Become So Inegalitarian](#)” I argued that the inequality that characterizes our society at present “is rooted in a more fundamental problem [than the ones that I had just listed], the fact that the *household* is the basic ‘people unit’ in this society.” That is, I

attributed our inequality problem to an *institutional* factor. In the current essay I *continue* that line of thought—but:

- Only in terms of presenting some hypotheses (*assertions*, actually, given that I make no attempt to present herein *evidence* in support of those “hypotheses”).
- Then follow those assertions by arguing that our current institutional situation *could* be very different from what it is. That is, I am convinced that it is not *inevitable* that our current institutional situation (“institutional furniture,” to use Veblenian language [2]) exists, and so argue to that effect.

The first point that I would like to make here is that because individuals differ genetically, in their life experiences, etc., it is to be expected that they would differ in what “drives” them. For some, gaining wealth, power, and fame are important, and they are “driven” to obtain one or more of those objectives; for *others*, however, such objectives are of little interest, other objectives—e.g., being a “good” person—being, rather, what *they* wish to pursue.

However, I would suggest (if not hypothesize!) that the *institutional situation* [3] in our society *at present* [4] both (a) *encourages* those driven by wealth/power/fame to become “possessed” by those drives, and also (b) *enables* them to “rise” in our society. [5] In doing so (i.e., “rising”), they have tremendous influence on the *rest* of us—so that (among other possibilities) *most* of us are “poisoned” to some degree by the values that drive them. And—perhaps more importantly—*because* of their position in our society, they are able (a) not only to *influence* our lives, but to (b) make *changes* in our society’s institutional situation that benefit *them*.

What’s significant—today especially—about such people being “possessed” is that they are *unable*—or at least *unwilling*—to recognize the *threats* that currently face us humans, such as global warming. What *this* means is that we have, and have *had* for many years, an ironic situation: Those in our society with the *ability*—because of their *position* (rather than intelligence, education, etc.)—to address our various problems have mental characteristics such that they *have* not done so and *will* not do so. As a consequence, we are *doomed*—with near-term extinction of our species being on the near horizon.

It didn’t need to come to this, however! There is a “*might have been*,” as my title suggests. Granted that this “might have been” cannot *be*—it’s too late for that! But if you are interested in my thoughts of what “might have been” anyway, read on! They at least have *intellectual* interest, I believe.

* * * * *

For a number of decades now I have been interested in “[utopian socialism](#)”—and specifically in the ideas of individuals such as [Henri de Saint-Simon](#), [Charles Fourier](#), and [Robert Owen](#). In part because of this interest, 30 years ago—in [1984](#) (!)—I wrote, and got published, “[Ecotopia](#):

[A ‘Gerendipitous’ Scenario](#)”, and later had posted two related essays, “[A Communities Program: Some Tentative Ideas](#)” and “[On \(Our\) Living in a Fantasy World](#).” In “Ecotopia” I had presented a 5-“wave” strategy for bringing about societal system change that, if implemented, would have involved “creative subversion” of our society—the gradual (but in terms of an “[S](#)” [curve](#)—i.e., initially slow change, then rapid change, and finally slow change again) replacement of the Existing Order with a new one. More specifically, it involved initiating a “Movement” that would act as a sort of *cancer* relative to the Existing Order: Specifically, it would involve an *economic* attack on the “host” (i.e., the Existing Order), and eventually “kill” it!—thereby making way for a New Order.

My “plan” drew its inspiration especially from Robert Owen [1771 – 1858], a Welsh reformer who had remarkably “modern” ideas for his time—some of them (regarding education especially) expressed in his [A New View of Society \(1813\)](#). After his famous experimentation at the cotton mills at New Lenark, Scotland, however, Owen broadened the scope of his ideas, and began to think at a societal scale. [Owen](#):

recommended that villages of “unity and cooperation” be established for the unemployed. Each village would consist of about 1,200 persons on 1,000 to 1,500 acres (400 to 600 hectares), all living in one large structure built in the form of a square, with a public kitchen and messrooms. Each family would have its own private apartment and the entire care of their children until the age of three, after which they would be raised by the community. Parents would have access to them at meals and all other proper times.

The “plan” that *I* presented in 1984 differs from that of Owen in (basically) three respects, however:

- Owen was interested primarily in the *social* aspects of the communities that he was recommending, whereas my interest was primarily of an *ecological* nature. [6] Just as Owen was thinking of “[intentional](#)” [communities](#), so was I, except that *I* was also thinking in *ecological* terms and Owen—of course, given when he was living!—was *not*.
- The “villages” advocated by Owen were to contain around 1200 individuals, whereas I was thinking of much smaller communities—initially, at least, with, however, communities being allowed to grow to about 500 individuals. (At a later point I learned about “[Dunbar’s number](#)” (150)—which would suggest that as a community grows beyond 150, a point will be reached where a subdivision into two groups should somehow be made, and then three groups, with the community not being allowed to exceed a population of around 500. As [Kirkpatrick Sale](#) argued a number of years ago—in a [huge book](#)!—there are virtues to smallness.)
- [Owen](#):

believed that . . . [the] communities [that he advocated] could be established by individuals, by parishes, by counties, or by the state; in each case there would be supervision by duly qualified persons. Work and the enjoyment of its results would be shared collectively.

I, in contrast, had hopes that a Movement could be initiated, with financial backing from a few wealthy individuals not “possessed” by our society’s dominant values (for I believed that at least a few such individuals existed!), and that as some of the initial “pioneers” gained experience in community building and living, they would then initiate new community projects. In addition, as “outsiders” came to learn of the superiority of *community* living over their *current* (so-called) “living” in the Existing Order, they would begin to flock to these communities—eventuating, at some point in time, in the collapse of the Existing Order, for lack of economic support.

My “plan” was never implemented, of course, for the lack of entrepreneurial leadership—and it is now too late to consider the plan, for we are inexorably headed down a path that will lead to the demise of our species.

Still, *thinking* about the “what if” of our future gives at least *me* some degree of pleasure!

Endnotes

1. Please note that the email address for me listed at the end of this essay—the *second* one, that is—is no longer valid.
2. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899.
3. For the purposes of my argument here I find it unnecessary to “flesh out” the particulars involved with “institutional situation.”
4. Granted that our current institutional situation developed over a long period of time, and was caused by a variety of factors, and in turn has been a causal factor for *other* phenomena. My focus here, however, is on the *present*.
5. Having “connections” also helps, of course!
6. Since writing that article I have become interested also in the *social* aspects of communities, and in drawing upon evolutionary thinking have advocated developing a way of life in accord with our “design specifications” as humans. See pp. 38 – 117 in my *What Are Churches For? In a sense, what I refer to as “design specifications” overlap to some degree with the “passions” associated with Charles Fourier [1772 – 1837].*

Technological Development:

Does it Have a “Life of its Own”?

Alton C. Thompson

That is, does technological development follow the principle “one thing leads to another”? In other words, when a given technological “advance” occurs, is it *inevitable* that those who use the technology (*some* of them, at any rate) can be expected to continually introduce *refinements*—and even *novelty* occasionally? Will a *mentality* develop within a society within which technology plays an important role that is *conducive* to continual refinements in existing technology—and new technologies emerging, from time to time, like “clockwork”?

If one examines technological development over historical time, and uses a broad sweep, one may very well conclude that technological development, once initiated, becomes a process that “feeds upon itself,” and that that is *necessarily* the case. But *is* it?

When technological development is examined from a “close in” standpoint, it is discovered that *different* societies exhibit different *rates* and *trajectories* of technological development—reflecting such factors as:

- The *size* of the society (especially in terms of population), with larger societies tending to be more active, so far as technological development, than smaller ones.
- The “fineness” of a society’s “division of labor.” For example, if a society has a “well-developed” division of labor, the job of some members of the society may be *technological innovation*. Thus, they give their full attention to this matter—because they are paid to do so!—and therefore either “produce” or are terminated.
- The *institutional structure* of the society—with some such structures being more conducive of technological “development” than others.

Regarding the latter point, here in the United States [1] the household is the basic societal unit, and I argued in my “[Why has Our Country Become So Inegalitarian](#)” that that fact helps account for the extreme (and growing) inequality that characterizes our country.

Although for *most* of the country the household is the basic societal unit, there are small “dots” on the map of the United States where this is true to a much lesser extent. What I am referring to here are the many “[intentional](#)” [communities](#) that exist in this country, many of them listed in the [Intentional Communities Directory](#). This Directory defines “intentional community” broadly, to include “ecovillage, cohousing, commune, co-op, or other cooperative living arrangement”

In addition, those listed under the heading “intentional community” *differ* in many other ways as well, as indicated in the “[Advanced Search](#)” section on their web site.

Of communities that might qualify for the label “intentional community,” the [Amish](#) are an example that has long intrigued me. [2] Here in Wisconsin (which ranks 4 in *number* of Amish, relative to other states) the [Amish](#) have a [number of communities](#)—and the Amish—who are the [fastest-growing religious group](#) in the United States—are [growing rapidly](#) in this state.

The Amish are primarily farmers and craftsmen (famous, e.g., for the high-quality furniture that they produce), and their communities tend to be far more “community-sufficient” than is typical for small towns in this country. From a *technological* standpoint, most of them (but with notable [exceptions](#)!) tend to be relics of the 19th century. However, the Amish tend to have an interesting attitude toward technology, and we should respect [their perspective](#):

Many outsiders assume the Amish reject all new technology. But that's not true.

One Amish man in Lancaster County, Pa., checks his voicemail about four times a day. His shop is equipped with a propane-powered forklift, hydraulic-powered saws, cordless drills, and a refrigerated tank where milk from dairy cows is stored.

The difference between Amish people and most other Americans is the deliberation that takes place before deciding whether to embrace a new technology. Many Americans assume newer technology is always better, and perhaps even inherently good.

“The Amish don't buy that,” says Donald Kraybill, professor at Elizabethtown College and co-author of *The Amish*. [3] They're more cautious—more suspicious—wondering is this going to be helpful or is it going to be detrimental? Is it going to bolster our life together, as a community, or is it going to somehow tear it down?”

There are 40 different Amish affiliations around the country, according to Kraybill, and they often reach different conclusions in answering those questions.

* * * * *

The Amish don't automatically embrace what's new, they evaluate it and decide if it's a good fit for the lives they want to lead. Kraybill believes that is where the Amish may have something to teach the rest of us.

What differentiates the Amish from us “English” (as the Amish tend to call outsiders) is that for them the basic societal institution is the *community*, for us it is the (isolated) *household*. That is not the *only* difference between them and us, of course; but from the standpoint of near-term survival, it is a *critical* difference:

Were the world populated *solely* with Amish folk, the threats to our continued existence that *we now face* would be non-existent.

(Which is not to say, though, that we would face *no* dangers—such as [solar flares](#).)

It has become increasingly clear that although technological development has brought us many good things (such as the computer that I’m using to type this), it has also given us (a) armaments which we have used to kill millions (and may [still](#) use to “wipe out” our species!) and (b) global warming (which may also “do us in” in a matter of decades, if not years).

In retrospect, technological development has been a mistake—but only from the standpoint that most “modern” societies (the United States *above all!!*) have lacked an *institutional structure* that might have been able to control *how* such development occurred. We are about to “pay the price” for that lack!

The Amish have lacked the scientific knowledge that would enable them to know that they were—and are—living in an “ecologically responsible” manner. *Some of us* know that our way of life is anything but “ecologically responsible;” our problem, however, is that our *institutional situation* fosters the emergence of “leaders” who are (in effect) “demon possessed,” and thereby *unable*—or at least *unwilling*—to recognize the *threats* that currently face us humans, such as global warming.

As a consequence, we are doomed!

Endnotes

1. Which is a *third-world* country in many respects (and horribly *evil* besides; see [William Blum](#), [Paul Craig Roberts](#), etc., for an abundance of proof)! Not having watched Michael Moore’s [Sicko](#) for some time—a movie about clueless individuals with a proclivity for crucifying themselves—unwittingly!—last night I decided to watch it again—and was reminded of the rottenness of the society that I live in! Damn you, great grandfather, for emigrating from your homeland to this s___hole of a country! Of course, you had no way of knowing that you were making a serious mistake.
Ironically, after writing a draft of this essay, I decided to take a break before finalizing the essay. In turning on the television to the local ION station, as “fate” would have it the movie playing was [John Q](#), starring Denzel Washington and Robert Duvall. Because this is such a gripping and well-acted movie, I watched it to the end. (I say “ironic” because this is another movie that points out how corrupt the medical system is in this country.)
2. It is important to note that the Amish are *not* a homogeneous group.
3. Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, and Steven M. Nolt, [The Amish](#). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

On Being Religious

Alton C. Thompson

One definition of what it means to “be religious” is this one:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

What *I*, at least, find significant about this definition is that it:

- Has an orientation to *behavior* rather than *belief*—i.e., *orthopraxy* rather than *orthodoxy*. This suggests—and strongly!—that what a person *believes* has no relevance for that person’s being religious. Which suggests, in turn (and in spite of what the above-quoted statement says), that not even a belief in “God,” however defined, [1] has relevance for “being religious.”
- Asserts that it is one’s *behavior relative to other humans* that is either religious or irreligious: Behavior that is *helpful* (without harming the other’s self-esteem, if possible) relative to others, is religious, *other* behavior is not. Not that other behavior is *necessarily unhelpful*, however—e.g., conversation with others is often of a *neutral* nature (but at times is either enjoyable, and thereby helpful, or is hurtful).

What’s to be noted here is that *ritualistic* behavior—such as “taking communion” (or whatever other label is applied to the “Lord’s Supper”), or even praying (!)—is *not* of a religious nature, being at most *neutral*. Ritualistic activity is, of course, not *irreligious*—but neither is it religious.

The above definition of “being religious” comes from the Christian Bible—and specifically [James 1:27](#). It is, thus, a definition with Biblical *authority* (for those who claim to accept the Bible as an authority—as, indeed, the virtual “Word of God.”). For those of us for whom the Bible is, rather, a significant work of *literature*, and if we are “in touch” with [our nature as humans](#) (as discovered by, e.g., primatologist [Frans de Waal](#) [2]), it is a passage that “speaks” to us, and has significance to us for *that* reason.

Ironically, despite the fact that this passage comes from the Christian Bible, and is the only place [3] in that work wherein “true religion” is defined, I know of no Christian *denomination* that claims this passage as its “heart and soul”! On the other hand, though, a *non-denominational* organization—[warm blankets](#)—does! [4]

The fact that no Christian *denomination* claims this passage as its “heart and soul” is, of course, a sad commentary on Christianity. One must keep in mind, however, that Christianity is *political* in its origins; it is a “religion” that was developed by the Emperor Constantine I [272 – 337 CE] to serve his needs as Emperor—which fact became more obvious when the Emperor Theodosius I [347 – 395] made Christianity—in the form of Roman Catholicism—the *official* religion of the Roman Empire. Given Christianity’s origins, then, it is not at all surprising that no Christian denomination has used the James passage, quoted above, or other passages having a similar thrust, as its centerpiece.

Even if the members of a given group *would* resolve to use the James passage to govern their lives, they would face at least two problems [5]:

- They would need to “operationalize” the concept of “helpfulness” embedded in the passage, doing so in a way that would be meaningful to them as individuals living in 2014 (or . . .), in some particular country, and in their particular circumstances.
- An important question that likely wouldn’t even occur to them is: Should they initiate yet another denomination or, rather, would there be a *better avenue* to travel down?

In my “[NeWFism and the Tradition](#)” I wrote of a hypothetical Tradition that *encompassed* the Christian Bible, but was broader in scope. A point that I made (at least implicitly) in that eBook was that those who initiate a new denomination *implicitly* assume that the Existing Order is in no need of replacement. Some may be convinced that it needs to be *reformed* in various respects, but few go to the extreme of claiming that a *New Order* is needed.

Does this reflect *laziness* on their part, *ignorance*, or a combination of both? But why even *ask* such a question?!, you may ask.

Here is *my* answer: If one belongs to a group all of whose members have resolved to live their lives in accord with the James passage, with the further proviso that at least *some* in the group have a degree of intelligence and education, a *few* in that subgroup will recognize that:

- The behavior of a given individual will be *partly* a function of his or her freely-made choices—such as the decision to live in accord with the principles of the James passage.
- But *societal* factors will also play a role. The dominant drives in our society (here in the United States, that is) are seeking (a) wealth, (b) power, and/or (c) fame. In addition, the constant bombardment with advertisements that we are forced to endure—which encourages the reader/viewer to “buy, buy, “buy”—has an effect on most of us. The net effect of these dominant drives and the message of advertisements is to make us *selfish*. On the one hand we are encouraged to *acquire* as much money as we can, and to then *spend* it on ourselves and our families. For a country within which Christianity is (still)

the dominant religion, this is a telling fact about our *behavior*. *Secular* values play a far more prominent role in this society than do “Jamesian” ones!

What’s so ironic about this is that despite this fact, so many in our society *know* what constitutes “good” behavior. For example, a recent winner of a multi-million lottery, when asked by a television reporter, what he planned to do with that money, stated that he planned to give most of it to various charities! The fact that such a wonderful gesture “made the news” is an indication that the news organization involved knew that most viewers would make the same conclusion that I did regarding this man: “What an admirable person!” After which, however, most will go on with their materialistic way of life! Were I a psychologist, I could probably offer a plausible explanation for this phenomenon.

Over the centuries there have been individuals who have recognized the necessity of societal system change, and have then either wrote “[utopian](#)” novels to express their ideas regarding how society *should* be changed, or—like [Robert Owen](#)—have engaged in efforts actually to *change* society. Today, there are a few successful “[utopian communities](#),” such as [Twin Oaks](#) and [Gaviotas](#). But no movement has yet developed that has “converted” a society into a New Society—including ones claiming to be “Christian.” [6]

Is it possibly true that societal change (in a Jamesian direction) *will not* occur because it *cannot* occur? Absolutely not!, as Jared Diamond argues in his [Collapse](#) (2005). In fact, if John Davies is right [in declaring](#) (in 2013):

The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.

it appears that a Jamesian *society*, to say nothing of Jamesian *world*, is a mere dream, one that will *never* be realized!

Endnotes

1. [Thorkild Jacobsen’s](#) classic [The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion](#) (1976) notes that the God concept *evolved* in that part of the world over millennia of time. Given that fact, it is not possible to believe that “God” has a single, universally-accepted meaning.
2. De Waal has authored numerous books, among them *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (1997).
3. As [this location](#), however, the claim is made that there are *five additional* passages—a claim that I will not dispute here.

4. One could argue, I suppose, that this organization takes the passage too *literally*—but I try *never* to be critical of individuals and organizations that I believe are helping others in some way, there being *so many* possible ways!
5. Note that I am limiting my attention here to the “orphans” and “widows” portion of the passage.
6. For example, there is the “[Christian Community Movement for Religious Renewal](#),” but its orientation is to the supposed “Second Coming” of Jesus rather than societal system change. (By the way, some would argue that Jesus already came twice—once when he was born, the second time when he (supposedly) came to life after dying on a cross, and being buried. For a sometimes amusing commentary on this, [see this](#).)

Controlling Others

Alton C. Thompson

The impulse to control the thinking and behavior of others is surely of a *pathological* nature, yet it is not that uncommon in this country (the USA). The *presence* of that impulse has significance, however, *only* because *many more* individuals in the country are *susceptible* to such control—which is *also* a pathological matter, of course! The presence of *both* types of people in the society is important because, e.g., it makes a mockery of our pretense of being a “democratic” society—for the influence of a *single person* (the one having an impulse to control others) is magnified many times over by the presence of many of the *second* sort of person.

I suppose that at times the presence of such individuals in this country has been a “force for good.” However, no example comes to my mind! (Which is not to say, though, that there *are* no examples!)

The presence, in a society, of individuals who are *susceptible* to control by others is *only* a problem, of course, if there are *others* present who have an impulse to *control* others. Thus, it is especially the *latter* sort of individuals who constitute a possible (likely!) problem for the society.

Those having an impulse to control others can *realize* their desire for control in a variety of ways. First, they can seek *position* in the society—given that the higher the position, the more authority/power, thus *potential* for controlling others, tends to be associated with the position.

On the one hand, one can seek position within the *governmental* structure of the society—first (in one’s “ladder climbing”) seeking a local position, then a county, then state position. At the national level there’s the House of Representatives, then Senate, then Chief Executive. (Supreme Court appointees also have considerable power; many believe that they “[appointed](#)” George “[war criminal](#) and [911 conspirator](#)” Bush as “our” president, thereby denying the presidency to [Al Gore](#).)

One can also seek position within the *private* sector, especially the “business community.” As one rises in position within a business firm, one gains control over more and more individuals who are “under” oneself. And as *companies* grow in size, they increase their ability to “buy” politicians, with the hope of affecting legislation that will be to their advantage. The individuals *directly* responsible for advancing the company’s interests in this way are likely to be rewarded *financially*, of course.

Which brings us to a second way to gain control over others—pursuing *wealth*. It’s likely that most of those who pursue wealth are too self-absorbed to use that wealth to gain power: Their interest in gaining wealth is to enable them to “live high,” which would involve not just spending lavishly on things for themselves, but “hobnobbing” with their “equals”—i.e., others with wealth (or at least celebrity). Occasionally, however, wealthy businessmen are interested in influencing politics, [David and Charles Koch](#) being an excellent example. Those of us who live in Wisconsin can thank the Koch brothers for our [current “wonderful” governor, college-dropout Scott Walker](#)—whose stint as Milwaukee County Executive was noted especially for the [corruption that swirled around his office](#).

Third, one can seek *fame*, and then use this to gain control over others. Those with such a “drive” tend especially to do so using the movie and music industries as their vehicles. Most who *do* gain fame in these industries are, unsurprisingly, content to seek fame as an *end in itself*. However, a few have an interest in politics, with the “[marvelous](#)” Ronald [Reagan](#)—“our” 40th president—being a good example.

Finally, being *charismatic*, having a magnetic personality, being a spell-binding speaker can propel one to a position of influence—and seemingly it is especially *such* individuals who can gain control over the *minds* (and, e.g., “pocketbooks”!—as with “[Christian](#)” [television evangelists](#)) of others. In modern history, two individuals especially stand out as having (had) an ability to attract many: On the *negative* side there was [Adolph Hitler](#); and on the *positive* side, [Fidel Castro](#). (Castro is a [hero to many](#) in Latin America—and for good reasons!)

Here in the United States, a person who stands out as a charismatic leader who was able to attract many was [Joseph Smith, Jr.](#) [1805 – 1844]. Like anyone, Smith had many traits of a positive—or at least neutral—nature, of course. Using Alex Beam’s recent (2014) [American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church](#) as my sole source here, the following positive (or neutral) traits were associated with Smith:

- He was a “prophet, seer, and revelator, the president of the High Priesthood, candidate for the presidency of the United States, king of the Kingdom of God, commander in chief of the armies of Israel, judge, mayor, architect, recorder of deeds, postmaster, hotel operator, steamboat owner, and husband, many times over.” (p. 6)
- He was a “jolly prophet.” (p. 6)
- He believed in “administering to the poor and dividing his substance” (p. 6)
- “Smith was a gregarious, articulate man, six feet tall and solidly built, with a long nose, a slightly receding hairline, and riveting blue eyes.” (p. 6)
- He was anti-slavery, and often reviled as an “Indian lover.” (p. 9)

- He was successful in getting the early Mormons to practice “pure communism.” (p. 20)

However, Smith also had a number of clearly *negative* characteristics (or at least was so *perceived* by some others):

- He came to believe (or at least *claim*) that “plural” marriage (i.e., polygamy) had a Biblical basis, and himself had somewhere between 33 and 48 wives (no one knows for sure). (p. 5) (One interpretation of this is that he must have been utterly insane—or at least a sex addict!)
- Alex Beam (author of the book from which I am quoting) states that Smith “indulged in megalomania.” (p. 7)
- Alex Beam refers to his “bumptious self-absorption.” (p. 23)
- In 1843 the young Charlotte Haven (from Portsmouth, New Hampshire) attended one of Smith’s speeches, and “found him to be ‘a great egotist and boaster . . . his language and manner were the coarsest possible.’” (Later, however, she told her mother: “‘They say he is very kind-hearted, and always ready to give shelter and help to the needy.’”) (p. 23)
- A Congregational minister named Benjamin Franklin Morris, who lived in Warsaw, Illinois (not far from [Nauvoo](#), the town founded by Smith), found Smith to be “both awe-inspiring and detestable,” and said of Smith: “‘He is a complete despot, and does as he pleases with his people. . . . He is a compound of ignorance, vanity, arrogance, coarseness and stupidity and vulgarity.’” (p. 23)
- In 1841 Thomas Sharp, editor of the *Warsaw Signal* (newspaper), wrote “‘How *military* these people have become.’” (p. 63)
- Smith often smeared—i.e., lied viciously about—those females who accused him of trying to seduce them. (p. 84)
- Alex Beam says of Smith: His “hypocrisy concerning polygamy was breathtaking.” (p. 102)

(What prompted this statement by Beam was that although Smith became a polygamist, and later openly promulgated polygamy, the *Book of Mormon*—**which Smith presumably wrote!**—condemns polygamy in two passages of the *Book of Jacob* (in the *Book of Mormon*), 1:15 and 2:27, 28!!) (p. 84)

As to the *Book of Mormon* itself:

- In an 1834 affidavit Smith's *father-in-law* (!) said that "'The whole was a delusion.'" (p. xiii)
- Humorist Mark Twain once referred to the book as "chloroform in print." (p. 19) (With endorsements like that, . . . !)
- Alex Beam: "When he [Smith] had completed the translation [of the golden plates], Joseph explained that [the angel] Moroni had taken the plates back to heaven." (A skeptic, regarding the book, might therefore say: "How utterly convveeeenient for Smith! He can't *prove* to anyone that there ever were such plates, and because of that fact invents a 'lame' explanation for his inability to do so!"

Although Joseph Smith was not an educated man, it's clear that he was intelligent and imaginative—and was expert at attracting followers, and exerting a high degree of *control* over them. Was he, then, a force for *good* or for *evil*?

After receiving a "revelation" in 1830, he started a "Church of Christ" (later referred to as the "Latter Day Saints," or Mormons) ("[Mormon](#)" being the alleged father of the angel [Moroni](#)). In 1831 the group moved to Kirtland, Ohio, then went to Missouri, and from there went east to found Nauvoo in Illinois. While in Missouri, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued, in 1838, his famous [Extermination Order](#), in which he stated: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary for the public peace." *That* explains why they left Missouri for Illinois!

Wherever they went, the Mormons aroused controversy for their ideas and practices, and the practices of Smith himself; and when a controversy arose in Nauvoo itself, with Smith ending up in jail in nearby Carthage, he was killed, in 1844, by what has often been called a "mob." Given, however, that this "mob" included (p. xiv) "a prominent newspaper editor, a state senator, a justice of the peace, two regimental military commanders, and men who just a few months before were faithful members of Joseph's church," the term "mob" would seem to be a singularly inappropriate label for that group!

To answer the question: "Was he a force for good or for evil?" Certainly many people of his time thought of him as an evil force (just as some Germans thought of Hitler that way, and undertook [efforts to assassinate](#) him), so is it *understandable* why Smith evoked strong passions in many: He was perceived even by many "upstanding" citizens as a threat to the American way of life.

But just because it is *understandable* why Smith was killed, that doesn't make it *right*. As Alex Beam states regarding this matter (p. xiv), "The leading citizens of southwestern Illinois could have imprisoned Joseph Smith. They could have chased him back across the Mississippi [River] and delivered him to his old enemies in Missouri. Instead, they killed him."

Although Smith's fellow citizens (*some* of them at any rate) judged him as an evil that *must* be eradicated, *I* make no such judgment here—for my interest is in a different direction. The question that interests *me* is:

How does one explain *why* such an individual arose to prominence in our society? (This *apart* from the fact that my basic view is that a situation of some having controlling others is, as I stated at the beginning of this essay, *pathological*—in that it tends to be *unhealthy*, in various respects, for the societies within which it occurs.)

I can conceive of three possible answers:

1. The individual was *born* with certain characteristics that favored the individual's becoming a *charismatic* (etc.) leader. Those characteristics needed to *develop* over time, of course, but it is virtually certain that they *would* develop, given their genetic basis.
2. The *society* into which the individual was born was one in which greed, success, and materialism were the primary values, so that if it was not possible, for the individual, to gain position (in either the “business community” or in government), or wealth, or fame in *conventional* ways, one's only option for becoming “successful” was to use one's “God-given” ability of charisma to attract followers, and build an organization, one, e.g., of an alleged “religious” nature.
3. The society into which the individual was born was of decisive importance, it being, however, the *institutional structure* of the society that *made possible* someone like Joseph Smith to arise to prominence—and exercise a great deal of control over most of the “sheep” in his “flock.” Had the societal structure been *different*, this *would* not have occurred—because it *could* not have occurred.

In my “[Why Has Our Society Has Become So Inegalitarian?](#),” I argued in favor on point 3, asserting that the fact that the *household* is our fundamental societal unit, is the basic reason for our being so extremely inegalitarian. I would now add that I believe that this feature of our society is the *basic* factor behind *most* of our problems. Had the “intentional community” been, over the years, our fundamental societal unit, *and* had the members of those communities been aware of human “design specifications” (see pp. 38 – 117 in my [What Are Churches For?](#)), I believe that our society would be relatively problem-free today.

Unfortunately, even *thinking* about this matter today is a waste of time. Why? Given that with global warming there is roughly a [40-year lag](#) between cause and effect, so that the manifestations of global warming *today* (e.g., the massive wildfires in the West) have their causes in what we humans were doing around 1974, it is virtually certain that we humans are headed for extinction—by, e.g., [2040 per John Davies](#).

“Religion” and Religion

Alton C. Thompson

Alex Beam, in his recent (2014) [*American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church*](#), states (p. 15) of Joseph Smith, Jr., that when Smith “was fourteen, Jesus Christ and his Heavenly Father [allegedly] appeared to him in a vision and promised to explain the tenets of true belief.”

Given the meaning typically attached to “religion” in this country (the USA), the “true belief” in the above quotation would, by most in our society, be interpreted as true *religious* belief. Such an interpretation raises, however, at least two questions:

- What *is* a “religious” person? That is, what is it about a given individual that qualifies the individual for the label “religious”?
- Given what a “religious” person is (not yet determined!), what, then, is a “religion”?

What makes this latter question important is that because *positive connotations* are associated with the word “religion” by most (but by no means all!) people in our society, this fact tempts many to apply the label “religion” to that which may only *partially*—if at all!—warrant that label. This is done in the hope—whether conscious or not—that the “good” associated with a “religion” will “rub off” on that to which they are applying the word. Put another way, the label “religion” can be, and has been, *prostituted*.

I should also note that people here and elsewhere have the bad habit of thinking of “religion” in either/or—*dichotomous*—terms: That either something *is*, or is *not*, a religion. As philosopher [George Boas](#) noted in his 1930 [*Our New Ways of Thinking*](#), in what is increasingly becoming an Age of Science, making distinctions in terms of *kind* is increasingly giving way to recognizing *degree* differences between things—using, e.g., the ordinal, interval, ratio, etc., scales—with *precision* in measurement becoming of growing concern.

What this would mean in religion’s case, is that it might at least be *conceivable* to use the labels “30% religion,” “67% religion,” “83% religion,” etc.—rather than simply “religion” when referring to an entity usually thought of as a religion. Even with a clear definition of “religion,” however, in practice it would be very difficult to *quantify* the degree of “religionness” (or “religiosity”?) of an entity claiming for itself the label “religion.”

Let us, then, “passover” (!) such problems, and proceed by first discussing the meaning of “religious” (as applied to human individuals), followed by one of “religion” *per se*.

Being “Religious”

Assuming it appropriate to use dichotomous thinking here (it’s easier!), a key consideration in determining whether or not a given individual is “religious” is asking: In answering the question, should one conceive “being religious” in terms of *orthodoxy* or of *orthopraxy*? That is, does “being religious” involve accepting a body of “correct” *beliefs* or, rather, does it involve accepting, and trying to live by, a body of “correct” *behavioral principles*?

Beam’s assertion (p. 8) that Smith was a “devoted follower of Jesus Christ” might make one think—the “follower” part of the statement—that Smith thought of “religious” in *orthopraxy* terms. But Beam’s *discussion* of Smith makes clear that Smith’s stance was a mixture of *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*—with much more thrown into the stew as well!

A Dr. Gene [Green argues](#) that—from a (Christian) Biblical standpoint—what might be thought of as “true religion” is defined in the following six passages:

- [Deuteronomy](#) 10:12
- [Micah](#) 6:8
- [Ecclesiastes](#) 12:13
- [Mark](#) 12:33
- [Romans](#) 13:10
- [James](#) 1:27

Although “God” is referred to in several of these passages, given that “God is love” (per [I John](#) 4:8)—rather than a Being “out there” somewhere—the “upshot” of these passages (expressed well in the famous “[Good Samaritan](#)” [parable](#)) is that a **“religious” person is one whose primary orientation is of an orthopraxy—i.e., behavioral—nature**. A “religious” person strives to maintain and improve his/her own health and well-being, of course, but not as an *end in itself*. Rather, the “religious” person recognizes a *responsibility* to others lacking in well-being, and does what s/he can to “minister” to them—but being careful, in doing so, not to damage the *self-respect* of the one being helped.

If the above describes—very briefly!—what it means to “be religious,” then what is a “religion”?

Religion

Although at times the label “religion” is applied to a *philosophy of living* ([Buddhism](#) being an example), those of us who live in the West tend to think of a “religion” as involving some degree

of *organization*. That's how *I* think of "religion," and the question for *me* is then: What should be the *purpose* of an organization warranting the label "religion" or "religious organization"?

Now if what "being religious" means (using a short definition) "loving the neighbor" to the best of one's ability—with "neighbor" being defined very broadly—it follows logically that **the purpose of a "religion" (as an *organization*) would be to help (primarily, if not exclusively) its adherents/members to be as *religious* as possible.** It's likely that a variety of *means* could be used by a religion to help its members be, and increasingly become, religious (as defined above)—including simple *socializing* to help members gain the sense that they "are not in this alone," thereby giving them the courage and resolve to proceed down the path that "[leads to light](#)."

Conclusions

"Religion," as I have defined it here, is an "[ideal type](#)" in a (Max) [Weberian](#) sense. That is, it is *not* a phenomenon that exists, in its pure form, in the real world but, rather, is a useful *intellectual concept*. Useful, that is, for evaluating those real-world phenomena/entities generally considered to be "religions." As I noted earlier, "in practice it would be very difficult to *quantify* the degree of 'religionness' of an entity claiming for itself the label 'religion.'" *That* fact does not, however, make the ideal type "religion" a useless concept.

I know of no "objective" procedure for determining degree of "religionness"—i.e., a procedure having intersubjective reliability (yielding universal agreement). Yet there is no reason why a *given individual* cannot take the definition of "religion" supplied above, and then make *subjective* judgments regarding, e.g., particular denominations of Christianity, for example.

I have had some contact with at least two dozen Christian denominations during my lifetime, and *my* considered judgment is that *none* of them "measures up" very closely—most of them having more of an orientation to *belief* than to *behavior*. What that tells me is that most denominations are willing "cogs" in the USan "machine" (the "US" here referring to "United States"). That is, the *values* that dominate our society—such as success, greed, and materialism—are *implicitly* accepted by most denominations, with the "love command" of *religion* (as defined above) being mainly given "lip service." Within a given congregation one will, of course, find wide variation in the degree to which the love command is given prominence. But the *general* picture is not a "pretty" one, so far as religion (as defined above) is concerned.

I have attended two Quaker meetings (*not* "services, for "service is what we do *after* our meetings!"), and the Quakers impress me as coming close to being religious people. Still, although their meetings may have a Biblical basis (e.g., [John 14:26](#)), I find [NeWFism](#) much more appealing. Unfortunately, not being a Joseph Smith type of person (from the standpoint of charisma, that is), I have not yet gotten that religion "off the ground"!

Even Smart People Do Dumb Things

Alton C. Thompson

To illustrate the claim made in my title, I have chosen three (3) statements for commentary. The statements are all from “[Earth’s Energy Imbalance: Confirmation and Implications](#)” by [James Hansen](#) and 14 (!) other authors. The statements:

Statement I (from p. 1)

Earth’s climate system has considerable thermal inertia. This point is of critical importance to policy and decision-makers who seek to mitigate the effects of undesirable anthropogenic climate change. The effect of the inertia is to delay Earth’s response to climate forcings, i.e., changes of the planet’s energy balance that tend to alter global temperature. This delay provides an opportunity to reduce the magnitude of anthropogenic climate change before it is fully realized, if appropriate action is taken. On the other hand, if we wait for more overwhelming empirical evidence of climate change, the inertia implies that still greater climate change will be in store, which may be difficult or impossible to avoid.

Statement II (from p. 4)

The destabilizing impact of comparable ocean and ice sheet response times is apparent. Say initial stages of ice sheet disintegration are detected. Before action to counter this trend could be effective it would be necessary to eliminate the positive planetary energy imbalance, now $\sim 0.85 \text{ W/m}^2$, which exists due to the ocean’s thermal inertia. Given energy infrastructure inertia and trends in energy use, that task could require of order a century.

Statement III (also from p. 4)

Given the unusual magnitude of the current planetary energy imbalance and uncertainty about its implications, careful monitoring of key metrics is needed. Continuation of the ocean temperature and altimetry measurements is needed to confirm that the energy imbalance is not a fluctuation and determine the net climate forcing acting on the planet.

Next, let me *summarize* the points made in these three statements (and in the process make a few comments):

Statement I:

1. Notes that the climate system of the earth “has considerable thermal inertia.”
2. Assumes that if any actions are undertaken to “mitigate” the effects of climate change, these will (*must?*) be done by “policy and decision-makers.”

3. The *fact* that there is a temporal delay between cause and effects (of roughly 40 years [1]) means that there is “an opportunity to reduce the magnitude of anthropogenic climate change before it is fully realized, if appropriate action is taken (by *governmental officials*, presumably, because it is *they* who are the relevant “policy and decision-makers”).
4. Waiting for additional empirical findings regarding this would be unwise because “the inertia [that exists in the system] implies that still greater climate change will be in store, which may be difficult or impossible to avoid.” (That is, further waiting may result in a situation being reached such that it will be *impossible* to slow further warming—so that we will enter a “[runaway](#)” phase of climate change, that could—I would add—eventuate in the extinction of our species).

Statement II

1. If “initial stages of ice sheet disintegration are detected,” “it would be necessary to eliminate the positive planetary energy imbalance” that now exists” before “action to counter this trend could be effective.” (Action by *governmental officials*, one assumes.)
2. “Given [the] energy infrastructure inertia [that exists currently] and trends in energy use, that task could require of order a century.” (Which raises the important question: Do we *have* a century to act?!—the “we” here alluding to governmental officials, of course. And if we *don’t* have much time, (a) what recommendations can/should be made to (a) governmental officials, (b) non-governmental organizations—and (c) us private citizens? If climate scientists feel unqualified to make such recommendations, who *can* and *should*?)

Statement III

1. “Continuation of the ocean temperature and altimetry measurements is needed to confirm that the energy imbalance is not a fluctuation and determine the net climate forcing acting on the planet.” (In other words, despite the fact that our current situation, as humans, is tenuous, and we may be near a critical “[tipping point](#)”—may, in fact, have already *reached*, and *crossed* it (!)—research on climate change *must* be continued.)

In reading the above three statements, I (at least) come away with the sense that Hansen *et al.* are locked into a certain—and strange!—mode of thought (for which psychologists may have a name, of which I am not aware, however). These statements give me the impression that these individuals have no *lives* outside of research—or at least that they are able to *separate* their *professional* lives from their *private* lives.

Granted that the source of their livelihoods is their *jobs* as researchers. But what I find so difficult to understand is how they are able to ignore the *implications* of their research for their own private lives. The “Implications” in the title of the article by Hansen *et al.* indicates that the concept of implications is not *foreign* to them. But when these climate researchers attach a *meaning* to “implications,” they are thinking especially in terms of *governmental officials*. That is, “given our research findings, what can we suggest to governmental officials that they *do*.”

I see at least three problems with that:

1. Their orientation to governmental officials—their assumption that those officials *can* and *will* do something significant—is naïve in the extreme. The U. S. government, for example, is largely under the control of wealthy individuals (e.g., the Koch brothers) and large corporations (fossil fuel companies and Big Pharma in particular)—individuals and organizations that are either ignorant about the seriousness of our current situation, or so fixated on next quarter’s “bottom line” that they are literally *incapable* of giving the future serious thought.
2. The recommendations that climate scientists *do* make to governmental officials tend to be of a trivial, non-radical nature. Put another way, their recommendations aren’t “worth the powder it would take to blow them up” (to quote a former boss of mine from Texas, who is now back in Texas).
3. I have this question for climate researchers such as James Hansen *et al.*: Why can’t they realize that their research findings have relevance for *their own lives*? In I.4 above I noted their point that waiting “for additional research findings . . . would be unwise.” Why can’t they go *beyond* this and recognize that *not* recognizing the implications of their research *for their own lives* is also “unwise”?! They realize (from Statement I) that “if we wait for more overwhelming empirical evidence of climate change, the inertia implies that still greater climate change will be in store, which may be difficult or impossible to avoid.” Yet somehow they seem able to compartmentalize their lives away from the *rest* of the human population, and live their lives as if global warming will not be affecting *them*—a ludicrous assumption, to be sure!

If they *do* recognize that global warming will affect *them* along with (virtually, if not entirely) everyone else (and it’s virtually impossible to believe that they *don’t*!), why aren’t they being vociferous in alerting the public about the crisis we face?—a crisis of which they are surely aware! Are they afraid of losing their jobs? If so, how utterly pathetic!!

What seems to be common among climate scientists is that they regard their research as *end in itself*. From time to time they may offer suggestions to policy and decision makers as to “what to do about it.” But I sense that they do this *reluctantly*—more out of a sense that this is *expected* of them than because they really *want* to do so. In a sense, this is not surprising, given that their training is in doing *research*, and *not* in making recommendations. With many, if not most, climate scientists (but not *just* such scientists) I sense that their interest is in doing research, with the hope that they will not only find answers, but find *additional* problems to tackle—that will enable them to *continue* to do research! Their preference, that is, is for a *life of science*, with the hope of not being bothered answering “what to do about it” questions.

Still, I find it surprising that climate scientists seem to give so little thought to how climate change will affect *their own* lives. After all, as climate change occurs, it will most definitely affect *them* along with the rest of us!

I should perhaps note at this point that the article by James Hansen *et al.* to which I have been referring was published in 2004—*10 years ago*. Because of that, it might seem that I have opened myself up to criticism by referring to statements made by Hansen and others long ago—

statements with which they might no longer agree. My justification for doing so, however, comes from this source. Two years ago (i.e., in 2012) Guy [McPherson had said](#):

A decade ago [i.e., in 2002], as I was editing a book on climate change, I realized we had triggered events likely to cause human extinction by 2030.

Now if Guy McPherson—who is *not* a climate scientist—could recognize in **2002** that we humans were in a dire situation, with the strong possibility that our species would be extinct by 2030, why, in **2004**, was noted climate scientist James Hansen unable to recognize that we humans are on a suicide path?!

Endnote

1. Here is a quotation from the article cited at the beginning: “Evidence from Earth’s history (3–6) and climate models (7) suggests that climate sensitivity is $\frac{3}{4} \pm \frac{1}{4}^{\circ}\text{C}$ per W/m^2 , implying that 25–50 years are needed for Earth’s surface temperature to reach 60 percent of its equilibrium response (1). [The (1) here refers to a citation to an earlier article by Hansen.] To say that there is a “40-year lag” is to express a rough average of 25 and 50. Alan Marshall [has commented](#): “Because of the difficulty in quantifying the rate at which the warm upper layers of the ocean mix with the cooler deeper waters, there is significant variation in estimates [made by climate scientists] of climate lag.”

Letter to the Editor

Alton C. Thompson, Greendale, WI

George P. Schulz, on the “Opinion” page (*Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2014), discusses “How to Get America Moving Again.” George is evidently living in a cocoon, and therefore doesn’t realize that we *are* “moving”—but toward catastrophe.

Let me begin here by quoting from the Climate Victory web site (<http://www.climatevictory.org/lags.html>):

One of the most frightening aspects of global warming, which few people realize, is that there's a time delay for the consequences of our actions to show up. The really catastrophic effects won't become obvious until it is too late to reverse them. The news media have been completely remiss in explaining this to the public. There are two key points about the science which everyone should know: lags, which delay and disguise the effects of our greenhouse gas emissions, and feedbacks, which magnify the effects when they do occur. Put these two effects together, and the science is clear that a "wait and see" approach to climate change is an invitation to disaster.

The article goes on to refer to “thermal lag delay,” and notes that:

it takes very roughly **forty years*** from the time we increase CO2 levels for most of warming to occur in response to that extra CO2. [The asterisk (*) here is for an endnote that gives links to relevant literature.]

Now if today’s weather conditions have their origins in what we humans did around **1974** (i.e., the 40-year lag referred to above), the question that I ask is: What will the weather situation be in, say, **2050**?! One scientist who has provided an answer to this question is John Davies, who in an article posted last year (<http://arctic-news.blogspot.com/2013/09/a-runaway-greenhouse-event.html>) stated: “The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.”

Professor Emeritus Guy McPherson, in commenting on this posting, has said (<http://guymcpherson.com/2013/01/climate-change-summary-and-update/>) “He considers only atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration, not the many self-reinforcing feedback loops described below” [in Guy’s posting]. Indeed, in an earlier posting (<http://guymcpherson.com/2012/10/only-love-remains/>) Prof. McPherson had said: “A decade ago, as I was editing a book on climate change, I realized we had triggered events likely to cause human extinction by 2030.”

These statements by Davies and McPherson are sobering, to say the least! What they suggest, however, (a) it may now be too late to do anything about global warming, and that (b) if geo-engineering measures are introduced, (1) this may occur too late to be effective, with (2) the possibility that they will exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the problem. (Recall that Al Gore had referred to such measures as “insane”!) (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2014/jan/15/geo-al-gore-engineering-climate-disaster-instant-solutio.>)

The above is not calculated to give the reader any degree of comfort, but that’s not *my* fault! We have known about global warming as a potential threat since the late 1930s, thanks to Guy Callendar (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Stewart_Callendar), but our leaders have ignored the problem over the years—and it is likely now too late to “correct” this problem! Given this, a good investment today (were it legal!) would be “life-termination” clinics à la *Soylent Green*! (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soylent_Green).

War is Good! [1]

Alton C. Thompson

The two major *known* threats to our continued existence as a species today are *global warming* [2] and the possible unleashing of nuclear weaponry during a *war*. Regarding the *first* of these threats, it's true that the *discoverer* of global warming—[Svante Arrhenius](#)—believed that global warming was a *good* thing:

[In 1906 he published [Worlds in the Making](#) (translated into English in 1908)] directed at a general audience, where he suggested that the human emission of CO₂ would be strong enough to prevent the world from entering a new ice age, and that a warmer earth would be needed to feed the rapidly increasing population:

I would contend, however, that Arrhenius's assessment that global warming is a *good* thing is understandable in light of *when* he lived (born in 1859, died in 1927) and *where* (Sweden). Were he living today—and even in Sweden—it's unlikely that he would sing the praises of global warming.

As to *war*, humans have had experience with it for *centuries*, *millennia* even. Given the devastation, loss of life, and permanent scars resulting from war, one would not expect that *anyone*—except perhaps a *deranged* individual—would contend that war is, and has been, a “good thing.” Yet [Ian Morris](#), in his recent (2014) [War! What is it Good For? Conflict and the Progress of Civilization From Primates to Robots](#), makes precisely such a claim. Responding to Edwin Starr's song “[War](#)”—which begins this way:

War, huh yeah
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing, oh hoh, oh

Morris asserts (p. 7) (as his “central argument,” p. 10):

war *has* been good for something: over the long run, it has made humans safer and richer. War is hell, but—again over the long run—the alternatives would have been much worse.

This assertion leads me to ask:

- Is Morris *mad*—in the sense of being [insane](#)? Or, rather,
- Is it simply a matter that his *reasoning* is flawed? That is, are some of his *assumptions*—technically, his *premises*—in serious error from an *empirical* standpoint, so that although his conclusion that war is good is a *valid* one (i.e., the conclusion *logically follows* from

his assumptions), it is a *false* conclusion by virtue of being derived from (some) false *assumptions*?

Of course, there is *also* the possibility that Morris is “on to something”—which is a possibility that we should not, of course, dismiss out of hand but, rather, must give serious thought.

Not being a psychiatrist I am not in a position to comment on Morris’s sanity or lack thereof—and I will grant him the [benefit of the doubt](#) on this matter. What I will argue, rather, is that some of the *assumptions* upon which Morris bases his conclusion lack merit—so that the *conclusion* that he reaches (that war is good) *of necessity* also lacks merit.

Wars *per se* involve *violence*, [3] of course, and the nature of [weaponry](#) has changed greatly over the centuries—so that weapons that exist *now* (e.g., atomic bombs) are far more deadly than those of the past. However, although wars involve violence, the *converse* is not true: Not *all* violence is associated with wars; rather, wars involve *state-sponsored* violence—with the *magnitude* of violence involved varying from war to war (depending, e.g., on the *size* of the states involved, the nature of the *weaponry* available—and used, etc.).

War has long been a subject of discussion [4], with Azar Gat’s massive [War in Human Civilization](#) (which he summarizes [here](#)), being a recent (2008) example. In *this* essay, however, I limit my scope to the argument set forth by Morris in his recent book.

As a starting point here, it will be useful to note the three (3) points that Morris wishes to make in his book:

1. By (p. 7) “fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized[,] societies that have reduced the risk that their members will die violently.” (In referring to dying “violently” here, I assume that Morris means both (a) dying in *wars* [5] and (b) dying as a result of violence perpetrated by individuals/gangs *within* a society.
2. Although (p. 8) “war is the worst imaginable way to create larger, more peaceful[,] societies, it is pretty much the only way individuals have found” to do so.
3. The (p. 9) “larger societies created by war have also—again, over the long run—made us richer.”

A tacit assumption that Morris makes is that large societies are “good,” with two factors especially *making* them “good”—and with no *negative* factors being associated with large societal size that might act as a *counterbalance* to the two “good” factors. The two factors which make large societies “good” per Morris, both of them related to societal size:

1. The more *peaceful* it will tend to be (in that its leaders will be less likely to support belligerent policies with reference to *other* societies—i.e., be “warmongers); and

2. The less *internal* violence will be associated with the society.

In making these assumptions Morris seems to assume, further, the following:

1. A small society is, by virtue of its smallness, prone to *internal* violence and *external* violence (i.e., initiating wars).
2. However, as the fighting of wars requires *organization*, the *fighting* of wars *promotes* the development of *organization*—which, in turn, promotes an increase in *societal size* (via the incorporation of the *conquered* society within the *conquering* one?).
3. That organization (in the form of *government*), once created, does not “fade into the background” *after* a war has been fought successfully. Rather, it remains in place.
4. *Because* it does, it is *able* to impose peace, and not only actually *does* so but thereby (p. 9) creates “the preconditions for prosperity.” That is, the emergence of a strong government enables a reduction in *internal* violence (in the now large society), while also reducing the loss of life via wars. The latter occurs because (a) a large is easier to defend than a small one (thereby less likely to be *attacked* than a small society), and/or because (b) a large society is less likely to be *bellicose* (i.e., prone to engage in offensive wars) than a small society.
5. In addition (p. 23), “the cumulative effect of the last ten thousand years of fighting has been to make people *live* longer.” (emphasis added)

I perceive little merit in any of these five (5) points, and therefore will not even bother rebutting them point by point. Rather, I choose here to approach Morris’s argument from a different “angle,” beginning by making some observations about his *evolutionary* comments:

- Morris states (p. 314) that “Biological evolution is driven by genetic mutations, with the mutations that work best replacing those that do not across thousands or even millions of years.”
 - Morris is correct in stating the mutations play a role in evolution, but doesn’t seem to recognize that it is mutations—*acting in conjunction with certain mechanisms*—that cause evolution. In the case of humans those mechanisms are (a) the [environment, and environmental change](#); (b) [predation](#); and (c) (female-choice) [sexual selection](#).
 - Morris refers (p. 333) to “waiting thousands of generations for natural selection to change us” and (p. 382) “the relentless pressure” exerted by natural selection. If Morris is giving “natural selection” the same meaning given to it by Charles

Darwin (see my [Ringing the Bell for Darwin](#)), it must be concluded that “natural selection,” so defined, *played no role whatsoever in human evolution!*

- Morris asserts (p. 298) that “our own violence, like that of other creatures, must be an evolutionary adaptation.”

I am in utter disagreement with this latter claim, basing my disagreement on my belief (developed to an important degree in my [What Are Churches For?](#)) that the [Agricultural Revolution](#) of about 10,000 years ago represented a significant “break” in human development—in that it marked the end of human *biological* evolution, and the beginning of “cultural” developments.

My view is that there was a co-development of humans as biological entities and their ([gatherer-hunter—or forager](#)) way of life during the exceedingly long period prior to that Revolution. That is, on the one hand humans came to “fit,” biologically, the gatherer-hunter way of life that they were practicing, and as human brain size increased, one result was subtle *changes* in way of life. Peoples occupying different part of the globe of course developed ways of life that “fit” the local environment—so that *variation* developed between the various gatherer-hunter groups. But there was enough similarity from one group to another that the label “gatherer-hunter” could be applied to *all* groups then existing.

Whereas the local environment had *some* relevance for how the inhabitants of the area developed *biologically* (and *changes* in the environment—insofar as they did not cause migrations—also had biological consequences), the primary relevance of the local environment was on the *nature* of the gathering-hunting activities that occurred in that area.

So far as how *behavioral* characteristics (having a biological basis) came to be shaped over time, two factors in particular were evidently involved. First, those individuals living in groups had a higher probability of avoiding death at the “hands” of [predators](#) than those individuals living as isolates. Because living in a group requires that one exhibit *cooperative* behavioral tendencies (at the risk of being banished from the group!), the members of a group would tend to be those individuals with a “natural” (i.e., genetic) proclivity for engaging in cooperative behavior—along with those individuals who had *learned* to be cooperative (either as a result of their observing how others *behaved*, or as a result of being explicitly *taught* that cooperative behavior was expected of them, as members of the group).

Second, it’s likely that [female-choice sexual selection](#) would be operating within any given group. That is, rather than a harem-like situation (in which one male mates—and does so exclusively—with the various females in his “harem”), *females* would be the ones choosing which males with which to mate. Females would especially be expected to choose those males (or that male) who (a) exhibited cooperative tendencies—e.g., in providing food to them, and/or (b) exhibited a willingness to provide protection for them against predators. Insofar as the

cooperative behavioral tendencies here had a *biological* basis (which would have been highly likely), the implication is that progeny would tend to be born with an *innate* proclivity for cooperative behavior. And even those *lacking* such an innate proclivity would learn, over time, to be cooperative in their behavior relative to others in the group.

Given these “mechanisms” operating with early humans, the *tendency* would have been for relative harmony to prevail within any given group; and because the number of humans was so *small*, prior to the Agricultural Revolution, relative to the size of the earth, little contact likely occurred *between* groups—and there is little reason to believe that the contacts with other groups that *did* occur would involve violence. Thus, the thesis of anthropologist Lawrence H. Keeley, presented in his [War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage](#) (1996) that war was common before civilization appeared on the scene is difficult to accept—given the above discussion. On the other hand, however, it would be unwise to *dismiss* his thesis out of hand!

I am not sufficiently knowledgeable regarding the relevant research to be able to rebut Keeley. I would note, however, that an opposing view *has* been argued by [Raymond C. Kelly](#) (see, e.g., [this](#)). One scholar has made the [following comment](#), for example, about the two gentlemen:

Raymond Kelly is not prepared . . . to give up the doctrines of the pacified past. And, despite all the evidence he has mustered against those doctrines, Keeley takes Kelly’s argument seriously. Why? Because Kelly argues carefully and dispassionately. He accepts almost all of what Keeley points out about tribal peoples since the Neolithic. He also accepts that tribal peoples everywhere have been violent, not peaceful and gentle. Yet, sifting the evidence finely, he still believes that warfare originated very late in human evolution and that he can pinpoint what led to its emergence and proliferation. He observes that “excepting a single Upper Palaeolithic site, archaeological evidence points to a commencement of warfare that postdates the development of agriculture. This strongly implies that earlier hunter-gatherer societies were warless and that the Palaeolithic was a time of universal peace.”

My position on this matter is that although empirical evidence—such as that presented by Keeley—certainly carries a great deal of weight, so should weight be given to what scholars believe regarding the *mechanisms* involved in human evolution, and their implications. Thus, although I am unwilling to discount the empirical findings presented by Keeley, my knowledge of evolutionary processes makes me somewhat skeptical of them—so that I find the arguments of Kelly rather convincing. Especially if he is correct in his argument that “archaeological evidence points to a commencement of warfare that postdates the development of agriculture”—suggesting that gatherer-hunter societies tended to be rather peaceful—does his position have merit.

What I suggest, then, is that we leave the questions of (a) *whether*, in the distant past, humans were, or were not, violent, and (b) *how* violence may have either increased or decreased to the side, and await more definitive conclusions from scholars. In the meantime, the argument

regarding the development of violence, with humans, that I presently find *most* convincing is the following:

1. The development of agriculture, around 10,000 years ago, which occurred over a period of centuries, not years, resulted in a change in *way of life* for those involved.
2. One implication of this change in way of life is that the members of a society for which agriculture was becoming, increasingly, the basis for sustenance, (a) provided the members with an increasingly different set of *stimuli*, (b) required members to engage in a new set of *behaviors*, and also (c) required members to use their *brains* differently (e.g., engage in more *abstract* thought). These changes meant that the members of developing agriculture-based societies were encountering increasingly *discrepant* conditions, so far as their “design specifications”—formed earlier, over a long period of time—were concerned. (See pp. 38 – 117 in my [What Are Churches For?](#)) Put another way, the way of life that they were now beginning to live was increasingly “unnatural.”
3. This in itself meant increasing *ill-being* for those living in any given group—although that ill-being may have only been dimly *sensed* rather than consciously *recognized*.
4. Given the genetic variability that exists within *any* given group, some of those sensing increasing ill-being, and acting on their particular genetic proclivities, began to seek “position” within the group, and thereby authority—or at least some degree of control—over the other members of the group.
5. Associated with this (and for reasons for which I currently can offer no firm explanation [6]), groups began to grow in population size.
6. As groups grew in population size, the *mores*, etc., which previously had served to control individual behavior began to break down.
7. This fact, in conjunction with point (4) above, resulted in increasing *differentiation* within the group—i.e., the development of a hierarchical *class* system, with its differential *rewards*.
8. Given that those who sought, and gained, “position” in the society tended to have more aggressive (and thereby [pathological](#)!) personalities than the others in the group, they were able to get their (male) fellows to follow them into “wars” with neighboring groups.
9. By incorporating conquered peoples into the society, the society tended to grow even more.

10. As the society continued to grow in size, the “forces” that had been unleashed grew more and more intense—a sort of “[snowball](#)” effect.

Granted that this alternate “explanation” for why war emerged is basically of a *speculative* nature. But, in my defense, I would note that Morris himself relies on speculation to a degree: For example, he states (p. 18) “The plain fact, as [Thomas] Hobbes had understood, is that over the past ten thousand years war made the state, and the state made peace.” But then on p.16 Morris “confesses” that Hobbes “was always more interested in abstract speculation than in evidence.” (Why, then, does Morris regard [Hobbes](#) [1588 – 1679] as an *authority* on violence?!) [7]

In conclusion, although I may be wrong in my belief about the “peaceful savage” (for me, this is still an open question), I believe that my “scenario” (perhaps a better term than “explanation”!) of how war developed has merit, and should be “tested” against whatever “facts” are currently available.

My most important quarrel with Morris, however, is that he seems to believe that war has (p. 22) “evolutionary functions.” I, however, see war primarily as a “fruit” of the “Fall”—into *agriculture*, that is. [8] It *might* seem to follow *logically*, from such a conclusion, that to eliminate war, it would be necessary to “return” to a much “simpler” way of life (but not necessarily a gatherer-hunter one). My view regarding that, however, is that:

- Such a “return” would not be *possible*—at least given the size of the world’s population at present.
- Even if a literal return were *possible*, it would not be *desirable*. As [Gregory Bateson](#) recognized, [9] in doing so we would likely lose the *wisdom* that we have gained over the centuries—making it likely, then, that we would simply repeat the mistakes of the past!
- Given that our species appears headed for *extinction* currently (by 2040 per [John Davies](#), by 2030 per [Guy McPherson](#)), there is no point in even *trying* to “save” ourselves!

Endnotes

1. A statement that calls to mind [George Orwell](#)’s famous “[War is peace!](#)”
2. One should keep in mind that the term “global warming” is not a *single* phenomenon but, rather, is shorthand for a *number* of related phenomena: Not only a global *trend* in atmospheric warming, but also, e.g., (a) an increase in the *number* of storms, (b) an increase in their *severity*, and (c) increased *variability*, at any given location (more at *some* locations than others, of course), in *weather* conditions. An implication of this latter fact is that the very *concept* of “climate” is becoming increasingly meaningless—like “unicorn” a name for something that has (*increasingly*, at any rate) no referent (although it might be more accurate to say that it is like

the [Cheshire cat's](#) grin—i.e., it is gradually fading away). For that reason I prefer the term “global warming” to “climate change”—although I like “[trendular atmospheric depatternization](#)” (!)even more—although I will admit that that term is a tad (!) cumbersome.

3. This assertion, although being *generally* true, requires qualification. The “[counting coup](#)” practiced by Plains Indians in what became the United States did not necessarily involve killing: “Any blow struck against the enemy counted as a coup, but the most prestigious acts included touching an enemy warrior with the hand, bow, or with a coup stick then escaping unharmed.”
4. For example, going back centuries in time, there is the “[History of the Peloponnesian War](#) [by [Thucydides](#), which] recounts [the 5th century BC war](#) between [Sparta](#) and [Athens](#) to the year 411 BC.”
5. If one dies in a war, this can be either because (a) one is an *active participant* in the war or (b) one is a *civilian* killed by an invader (via its army, navy, or air force)—for example, the thousands of [Japanese we killed](#) (*unnecessarily!*) with our bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
6. My best guess, at present, however, is that the new agriculture-based way of life somehow conduced growth in size (population) of the group.
7. Note that Morris, in referring here to “the past ten thousand years,” is referring to the period of time *since* the Agricultural Revolution got underway. By implication, then, he admits that *prior* to that Revolution—when all humans were gatherer-hunters—war was either rare or non-existent!
8. I have borrowed the term “Fall” from geographer Warren Johnson’s [Muddling Toward Frugality](#) (p. 43 of the 1979 Shambhala edition). The word “Fall” usually is given a [religious](#) interpretation, of course.
9. See his [Steps to an Ecology of Mind](#): *Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1987, p. 500. Originally published by the Chandler Publishing Company, 1972.

The Importance of Giving Praise

Alton C. Thompson

But only when praise is *due*, I must add; for *insincere* praise is, in my opinion, worse than *no* praise at all.

As I age (I am now 74 ½+), I find that my memory is fading about many of the things that I have done in the past. I *know* this because when one of my friends asks me—as he often does!—about something that we had done together in the past (last summer, for example), I am often—*usually*, I must confess!—unable to remember it. In *his* mind, this means that I don't *care* that we had done something together, and he finds this hurtful—and tells me so! In fact, he has even told me that he is reluctant to do anything with me in the *future* because I won't remember doing it—which hurts *my* feelings!

I have tried to explain to my friend that memory loss is a part of the aging process (I'm about 20 years older than him), but his view seems to be that my memory is *selective*. That is, I can remember events that *didn't* involve him, but am unable to remember events that *did*. For him, this means that I don't *value* his friendship, and when he *tells* me this, I feel hurt. I don't think that he *intends* to hurt me, but he doesn't seem to realize that in *telling* me this, he is putting our *friendship* in jeopardy—because it makes me feel increasingly less *close* to him. In other words, for me, it is *alienating*. I have been trying to *resist* allowing what he says to me result in my terminating our relationship. I must admit, however, that his reactions have been putting a *strain* on our relationship—with the possibility that they *will*, at some point, eventuate in its termination.

Personally, I don't believe that my failure to remember many of the things that my friend and I have done together means that I don't *value* his friendship; after all, we have known each other for over 35 years, and that fact alone should mean (I believe) that our friendship is, and has been, built on a solid foundation. However, virtually by definition I don't know what's going on in my *unconscious*, and it's certainly possible that my *unconscious* has been filtering out—for reasons of which I am not *consciously* aware—many of my memories involving the two of us.

I use the above discussion of memory, and its lack, as a prelude to the *main* point that I wish to make in this essay, that it is important to praise others when praise is *due*—and *can*, therefore, be offered with sincerity. In making this point, I will limit my attention just to praise that *I* have received over the years. Interestingly, although I'm sure that I have received my share of *criticism* over the years, I have little *recollection* of past criticisms: Most of them have seemingly disappeared from my “memory bank.”

This raises the question: Are we humans “designed” with a “drive” to protect our egos? So that when we receive criticism, we may react either by *evaluating* it, *accepting* the parts of it that “ring true” to us, and then “reforming” ourselves—in the (unconscious) “hope” that we will not be open to that sort of criticism in the future (one way of protecting one’s ego)? And, are we—or *some* of us, at least—*also* so designed that we (unconsciously) strive, at other times, to protect our egos by *brushing off* any criticisms directed our way?

Whichever way one reacts, it is understandable why one might have difficulty remembering criticisms directed against oneself in the past: The unconscious “mechanisms” operating within one’s brain are doing their “job”—“working” to protect one’s ego.

Not only is my “memory bank” basically clear of past criticisms directed my way (a phenomenon that I suspect is common); I can remember just a few instances of *praise* received in the past. I suspect that the main reason for this is that most of us seem very reluctant to give out praise; so that given this, like most people, I remember few instances of being praised *because those instances have been “few and far between.”*

Now it is relatively easy to understand why most of us have little recollection of past criticisms directed our way: One of the *functions* of our unconscious is *ego protection*. But why is it that we tend to offer so little praise to *others* (except that it is common for parents to praise their children, especially when the children are very young)?—the consequence being that **most of us can remember few instances of praise in the past for the simple reason that we have received so little praise (especially from our teen years on)!**

I suspect that we *offer* so little praise to others in large part because we have *received* so little during our lives: The adults around us have been caught in a “vicious circle” and are not even *aware* of being caught—so that it is difficult for them to escape that circle; in being a “captive” of the circle, they offer little praise to their (older) children, who *themselves* then become a part of the circle.

In addition, it’s conceivable that our unconscious minds “tell” us that if we offer praise to others, this will result in building the other up *at our own expense*. In other words, the “drive” in us for *ego protection* may cause us to *withhold* praise from others, under the unconsciously-held assumption that to praise others is to *diminish oneself*. This “action,” on the part of our unconscious mind, may be utterly irrational and utterly lacking in truth-value; but insofar as it *controls* our thoughts and behavior we are powerless to resist it.

I stated earlier that although I have “forgotten” most past criticisms—perhaps by letting them “go in one ear and out the other ear”—I *am* able to remember *three* instances of praise from my past—the earliest one going back to over 60 years ago. I’m sure that I’ve had many more than three instances of praise in my life, but only three come to my mind. And when I reflect on *why* those *three* instances of praise have been remembered by me, while the others have been

forgotten, it occurs to me that **all three reflect my character as a human being**. *That* possibility—along with the fact that I *remember* all three—tells me that:

- It *is*, in fact, important to offer (sincerely felt) praise to others.
- If one is able to escape the “grip” of one’s unconscious—specifically, its false message that one will diminish *one’s own* ego by building up another’s—one will gain the *ability* readily to offer praise where it is due.
- In offering praise, one should not only do so only when one’s praise is sincerely *felt*, but should strive especially to offer praise that reflects on the other’s *character*—for doing so may very well help the other *further develop* his or her character. I take as a “given” that doing so would be “good,” and feel no need to defend that judgment!

As to the three instances of praise that *I* remember, the first is one that occurred while I was in primary school—in either seventh or eighth grade, I believe. When I started primary school, I was living in the small town of [Mt. Morris, Wisconsin](#), and spent my first two years attending the one-room school (with about two dozen students total, for eight grades!) just outside the “town” proper.

Then, my dad (a carpenter) and his partner built a (log) house for us near [Wautoma](#) (the county seat—about eight miles from Mt. Morris), and I completed my primary school education at the Waushara County [Normal School](#). As this school (created for teacher training) had a “model” classroom that gave aspiring teachers an opportunity to “practice” on us children, and this classroom accommodated only about two dozen children, attending this school was much like attending the one-room school that I had attended before—the main difference being that I was now exposed to *several* teachers, not just one.

One day, during recess, my next younger brother (who was three grades below me) was being bullied by a boy a grade behind me. Although this boy was slightly younger than me, he was a husky lad who weighed more than me. Despite this size differential, when I saw him bullying my brother, I thought to myself, “no one is going to get away with bullying *my* brother, if I can help it,” and I “tore into him.” I think that he was taken by surprise by the ferocity that I was demonstrating, and he quickly ceased his bullying.

A little later that day the principal—Ms. [Lulu Kellogg](#)—called me into her office, and I thought to myself “what have I done wrong?” Ms. Kellogg informed me that she had been looking out the window during recess, and had observed me coming to the defense of my brother. She told me how proud she was to see me do that—which, of course, eased my mind, given that I had anticipated something rather different! I have no recollection of what I might have said in reply, but it’s clear to me now that what I had done was simply a matter of instinct: I didn’t so much *choose* to act to protect my brother, but just did what I “knew,” in my unconscious mind, what

was “right.” Whether I would have done the same if the child being bullied was someone *other* than my brother, I do not know. I *hope*, however, that I would have done the same for some other child as well.

The second time that I received praise that I now remember occurred near the end of my years at Wautoma High School—when our family was again living in Mt. Morris. As a student I had been in band and chorus, on the debate team (my partner and I *never* won a debate!), and I had played a mortician (!) in our senior class play (“let me show you our lay-away plan”!). I had been a good student, and became the valedictorian of my class of 55. (Interestingly, the salutatorian of our class was a girl who happened to be *also* from Mt. Morris!)

One day prior to graduation the principal of the school—Ms. Mabel Bauman—called me into her office, and this time I didn’t approach the principal’s office with as much trepidation as I had while in primary school. I knew that I wouldn’t be “chewed out,” but had no idea of she *might* say. What she *did* convey to me that day was that was her view that I was one of the finest students that she had ever had in her many years of teaching (she taught History and Civics—and may have been a part of the reason I majored in History as an undergraduate at Wisconsin State College-Oshkosh—now the [University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh](#)).

Not having a competitive mentality—so that I never thought of myself as *competing* with anyone else—in learning that Ms. Bauman thought of me as “one of the finest students that she had ever had,” I was not only taken aback, but felt *uncomfortable*. In the class that I had been taking from her we had been discussing propaganda (among other things), and my “lame” response to her was that she was engaging in propagating propaganda! She corrected me on that, and I went away from her office “[on cloud nine](#).” When I think about that day, it makes me feel good—and as I am writing about it now, I am forced to brush the tears away from my eyes! Sorry, but I’m a person whose emotions are very close to the surface! That’s just the way I’m “built”!

The third, and final, time that I received praise that I remember occurred much more recently—when I was about 48, in fact. I had been unemployed for several years, desperately trying to find a job, but without success. Finally, I got an interview at a local engineering firm, and must have made a good impression, for I was offered a job as an Expediter. The company involved ([Astronautics Corporation of America](#), an avionics firm) had received a contract from the Zenith company to service the computers and peripherals that it had supplied to U. S. military bases around the world, and my job as an Expediter was to receive calls from individuals at those bases with service calls, and then to relay the information gathered to our field technicians, so that they could then do the necessary repairs.

As I have aged I have become more and more comfortable with myself and more outgoing, and when I received calls I just “naturally” would try to chat with the person at the other end of the line, and did so if the other person was *open* to chatting. As a consequence, the person at the

other end of the line—whether customer or field tech—gradually became a *friend*, and my job, as a consequence, then actually became *enjoyable*.

I must have been very efficient as well, for when I had my first review with my supervisor—Susan Vielbig (another female!—suggesting that praise comes easier to females than to males?)—I was given the good news that I was her best Expediter! This added to my sense of self-esteem, of course—but at this stage in my life I probably didn’t need much praise (i.e., many “strokes”) to feel good about myself. Still, receiving that praise was thoughtful on my supervisor’s part, and did not an ounce of harm to me!

Notice that all three of these cases I was being praised for things that I had done that reflected on my *character*. The significance of offering such praise, it therefore seems to me, is that it helps the *recipient* of praise further *develop* his or her *character*. Rather than making one feel *superior* to others (and, therefore, an *obnoxious* individual!), it increases one’s resolve to do *still better*—becoming an even *better* person than one had been before.

I make no claims of being a perfect person—or even being *close* to being one: I know myself better than anyone else, and know that I have many flaws. But who *doesn’t*?! All that we can do is to try to be *consciously aware* of what we are doing, and then to strive to do the *best* that we can.

My “message” here, then, is that if we can get in the *habit* of praising others when they *deserve* praise, and especially try to give praise of a potentially *character-building* nature, we can help those praised become still *better* people.

In offering praise to praise-worthy others one should not wait until they do something that, in one’s opinion, is *extremely* praiseworthy. Rather, one should look for *small* praiseworthy actions and offer praise, with the knowledge that this will help contribute to the other’s sense of self-esteem, thereby making likely that the other will, in the future, engage in praiseworthy actions that are ever more consequential, important.

In conclusion, I ask the reader to imagine that all, e.g., parents in the world followed the advice presented above. Now, ask yourself: What would the world be *like* if that were the case? I think that virtually *anyone* asking this question would answer: A *far, far* better place to live in than the world that we live in *now*!! Therefore, “[Go and do likewise](#).”

What is Love?

Alton C. Thompson

In our society *love* and (especially) *justice* are held up as having especial importance. Thus, it will be useful here to begin by giving some attention to justice.

The first point to make here is that love and justice do not occupy distinctly *different* realms but, rather, are overlapping. One might argue, for example, that it is one's valuing of *love* that causes one to pursue justice. Which implies that *love* is an attribute that we associate with *individuals*, *justice* one that we associate with *institutions*—and specifically our *legal* institutions.

It has [been said regarding justice](#) that:

According to most contemporary theories of justice, justice is overwhelmingly important: [John Rawls](#) claims that "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." [Note that he fails to mention *behavior*!]

And

Justice can be thought of as distinct from [benevolence](#), [charity](#), [prudence](#), [mercy](#), [generosity](#), or [compassion](#), although these dimensions are regularly understood to also be interlinked. Justice is [linked to] the concept of [cardinal virtues](#), of which it is one.

The concept of [fairness](#) is related to justice in that—referring now to a specifically legal context—if *fairness* occurs during the course of a trial, one has a good reason to conclude that *justice was served*. We also, however, use the term fairness with reference to interpersonal relationships and our relationships with institutions. For example, employees wish to be compensated *fairly*—usually meaning paid what they (believe they) [deserve](#). “Deserve” itself can, of course, be interpreted variously, with some arguing that (regarding wages) they should be paid on the basis of the *quality* of their work, others the *quantity*, with still others arguing that all should be paid *equally*, given that “we are all equal in God’s sight.” Etc.

A major problem associated with the concept of “deserving” is that it can easily result in one adopting a “[blame the victim](#)” stance. That is, if one holds the belief that fairness prevails in, e.g., the economy, so that everyone receives on the basis of desert, it follows that one will believe that the poor are receiving what *they* deserve. *Because* they are, one is allowed to argue, in good conscience, that given that the poor are receiving what they deserve, one is absolved of any responsibility to provide any sort of assistance to them. In fact, one might carry such an argument to the point of asserting that helping the poor would represent a disturbance of the *social order*, and therefore possibly dangerous!

Insofar as justice, in the sense of fairness, is involved in our relationships with other individuals and institutions, it is usually understood as existing at a somewhat *lower* level than love. That is, one may treat the others with whom one interacts with *fairness*, but it does not follow from *that* fact that the motivating factor was *love*; rather, one's treatment of others *fairly* may have been motivated by, e.g., a conviction that one is *obligated* to treat the other decently. How, then, does treating one in a *loving* manner differ from treating others *fairly*? Those of us raised in Christianity might, for example, cite the [Good Samaritan parable](#) as a story exemplifying what "love" means. What being "loving" means, that is, involves:

1. When one is "out in public," don't be preoccupied with one's work or whatever but, rather, observe the people whom one encounters, and make judgments about their degree of well-being.
2. If one observes certain individuals who seem to suffering from ill-being, and one is not pressed for time, (a) try to make a judgment as to what their needs are, and then (b) try to engage them in conversation, and (c) if they are willing to converse with you, (d) seek to explore with them the nature of their ill-being, and, finally, (e) do what one can to help them. If the individual(s) is, e.g., obviously in need of *medical attention*, call 911, of course (unless someone else already has).

Of course, the Good Samaritan parable was told at a point in history when communications technology was very primitive compared with what exists today. Therefore, the *modern* Good Samaritan might seek out volunteer opportunities, identify and give financial support to, charitable/relief organizations, etc.

Although in the Good Samaritan story the word "love" is never used (but is *implicit* in what occurs), [Chapter 13 of Paul's I Corinthians](#) is a famous Biblical [paean](#) to love, and for that reason is often read during wedding ceremonies. What Paul says under the heading "love" can be placed into two groups, as follows:

A. How the loving individual relates to others:

1. Is kind.
2. Protects the other.
3. Trusts the other.
4. Shows honor with reference to the other.

B. Certain *personal* attributes are associated with the loving person (which *help* conduce loving behavior). A loving person:

1. Is patient.
2. Is not envious.

3. Is not boastful.
4. Is not proud.
5. Is not self-seeking.
6. Is slow to anger.
7. Keeps no record of wrongs done to oneself.
8. Rejoices in truth.
9. Hopes.
10. Trusts.

What can one possibly *add* to a list such as this, one might very well add?! There *is*, I believe, one very important point that *can* be added:

To be *truly* loving, a person must first be *empathetic*. It is not enough to just learn a set of “rules” (as Paul’s list *can* be perceived—and as it *implies*), and then try to *follow* them. One must first strive to develop the *capacity* for empathy, and then *act on* that capacity.

Unfortunately, I can offer here no *guidance* on how one can develop a capacity for empathy; I would, however, like to think that we humans are “[hard-wired](#)” to be *empathetic* (as primatologist [Frans de Waal](#), e.g., has argued), and that it is only our “possession” by the dominant value system of our society (consisting of greed, materialism, and selfishness, e.g.) that prevents so many in our society from being empathetic. (The [Fundamentalists](#) among us would attribute the possession of these traits to the “[original sin](#)” supposedly committed by [Adam and Eve](#) while in Eden, when in actuality those traits have a *societal* basis.)

The *fact* that empathy is the basis for love is an important one. But the fact that everyone is *different* (in terms of interests, intelligence, personality, etc.) is *also* important—especially in the case of those others with whom one has *personal* contact. For the *knowing about* that one will have relative to such people will enable one to *individualize* the love that one demonstrates for them—meaning that the love one demonstrates for *one* person is likely to differ from that demonstrated for any *other* person. Thus (and to borrow an item from Paul’s “list”), *how* one is kind to *one* person is likely to differ in its specifics from how one is kind to *another* person.

Still, an important point that needs to be added to this discussion is that one does not need to *know* another to have empathy for that person. I’m convinced that most of us are born with an ability to [read faces](#), so that whether one has personal contact with others or “merely” sees others on the television (or movie) screen, most of us can “read” the emotions of others by viewing their faces (along with watching their bodily movements, gestures, etc.) It’s true, of course, that the emotions expressed by an *actor* are not genuine; but what makes an actor a “good” actor is his or her ability to convey to the viewer a given emotion *correctly*—i.e., in a fashion such that it will be “understood” (at an unconscious level) by the viewer. (As an aside, is not what we consider a “great” movie one that evokes in us *many* of our *emotions*? A rhetorical question!)

Thus, the modern person with the capacity for empathy can go far beyond the Good Samaritan. Who among us, seeing the faces of those in pain in Africa, Iraq, or wherever, have not wished that we were billionaires, so that we could provide help to the millions in desperate need our sorry world?!! I, for one, can't help but feel this way. I suppose that I should wish that I had been brought to be a person who valued wealth and fame; I know, however, that it is precisely *that* sort of person who tends to be [Scrooge](#)-like (before Scrooge became *transformed*, that is—the ostensible point of that story being that transformation *is*, in fact, possible).

In conclusion, acquiring *ideas* regarding what it means to be loving (by reading what Paul wrote in I Corinthians, e.g.) is of value, but is not enough. One must also have *empathy*; and those who are able to resist the pressures placed on us by our society to be individualistic, greedy, materialistic, selfish, etc. *will* have that ability. If you *lack* that ability, why not try to acquire it? For if you do, not only others, but *yourself* will benefit—as the transformed Scrooge came to realize.

Jesus is quoted as having said ([Luke 12:48](#)): “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” Those “under the influence” of our society’s dominant values are, however, even if nominal “Christians,” likely to respond to this statement by saying: “I haven’t been *given* anything; I’ve *worked* for everything that I have.” In a *narrow* sense this may be true. The *point*, however, is that such an attitude violates the *spirit* of what Jesus is said to have declared, and reveals allegiance to current (dominant) *societal* values rather than “*Jesuan*” ones.

On Being Kind

Alton C. Thompson

Paul of Tarsus, in his famous paean to love (in [1 Corinthians 13](#)), wrote (v. 4):

Love is patient, love is kind.

Much more recently, there has developed a “movement” of sorts that has advocated “random acts of kindness”—and a [random acts of kindness foundation](#) has even been created.

Both, however, suggest the question: What does it *mean* to be “kind”? We tend to think of “kindness” especially (but [not exclusively](#)!) with reference to other *human individuals*, of course. In addition, we tend to think of “kindness” as a sort of *behavior* engaged in relative to other human individuals. But what *sort* of behavior—or behaviors—*constitutes* “kind” behavior? It is *that* question which I wish to explore in this essay.

Given that “kindness” is a sort of behavior that one engages in with reference to *others* (other *human individuals* in particular), a useful starting point here is to recognize that “others” can be placed into at least five categories:

1. Absolute strangers.
2. Quasi strangers.
3. Acquaintances.
4. Friends
5. Romantic partners.

These are not, of course, categories separated by *rigid barriers*. For example, a “complete stranger” may at some point in time become an *acquaintance*—and eventually become a *romantic* partner. The point that I wish to pursue here, however, is the fact that the other’s *status*—as a stranger, friend, etc.—at a given moment in time will have relevance for (a) *how* one will (or should!) relate to the other and, therefore, (b) the *manner* in which one’s *kindness* toward the other will (or should!) be expressed.

In interacting with others one *need* not exhibit kindness, of course—and, unfortunately, too many interactions that occur in our world are *not* characterized by kindness. The focus of the present

essay, however, is not so much with *that* fact but, rather, on the *normative* matter of *how* kindness might *best* be expressed in different situations.

(As an aside here, note that with, e.g., the category “friends” mutual kindness is *assumed* to prevail within a group of individuals who so regard one another. The reason for this is obvious: If one’s friend begins to behave toward oneself in an arrogant, obnoxious manner, one is likely to *withdraw* one’s friendship from—to *terminate* one’s friendship with—that individual. Unless, that is, one is a masochist! And if the other is one’s husband or wife, one is likely to *divorce* the other!)

Before going further, let me say a few words regarding each of the five categories listed above:

1. Absolute strangers—those of whom one has no *personal* knowledge. One may have *seen* the other in movies or on television, or have *read* about the other, and as a consequence have *some* idea about what the other is “like.” However, given that one has never *actually* interacted with the individual, that individual remains an absolute stranger. One may accidentally bump into another while walking down the street, and may interact *briefly* with that individual by excusing oneself, but the other *remains* a stranger.
2. Quasi strangers—those with whom one interacts, perhaps even on a regular basis, but one’s interactions are of a rather formal sort. For example, the clerk at a grocery supermarket may ask “How are you today?” and one may respond “Fine.” But in part because there are people *behind* oneself in the store, one is reluctant to “hold up traffic” by going beyond one’s “Fine.” As a result, the clerk does not remain a *complete* stranger, but does not qualify as an *acquaintance* either.
3. Acquaintances—individuals whom one may *encounter* on a regular basis (e.g., in the elevator in the building in which one works), and with whom one exchanges a few words during each encounter—but one’s relationship with the other does not go beyond that *superficial* relationship. (Of course, an acquaintance can *become* a friend, however; indeed, presumably *each* of one’s friends was at *one time* an acquaintance!)
4. Friends—those who *have* been acquaintances, and one has grown to *like* as a result of one’s interaction with the other—because of a discovery, during the course of interactions, of a similarity in interests, in political/religious views, etc. That is, a *mutual attraction* has developed, which both parties wish to develop further from an interactional standpoint. As a consequence, one invites the other to one’s home, one goes to concerts or sporting events with the other, etc.

Fortunately, many in our society allow their sense of decency to “go the extra mile” and *expand* their circle of friends to others of different race, less education, a lesser degree of intelligence, the feeble (in nursing homes, etc.), individuals with handicaps, etc. Such

individuals, because they *deviate* in one way or another from the norm, have special needs, of course. And although one might find it challenging to *determine* how to be kind to those of one's friends who are "special" in one way or another, the *rewards* that come from one's interactions with such persons will (I have found through personal experience) *more* than compensate for the difficulties involved in developing the friendship.

5. Romantic partners—those (usually, but not always, of the opposite sex) who, after a period of interactions with another, one is attracted to *sexually* and/or as a suitable *marriage* (or live-in) partner (because of perceived parenting, cooking, etc., abilities/skills in the other). The other likely shares one's *values*, but need not share all of one's *interests*, have the same *educational level*, etc. After all (and referring now to *heterosexual* couples), the interests of males often do not coincide closely with those of females—so that the husband will retain a set of *male* friends with whom he interacts on a regular basis, and the wife will do the same with a *different* set of *female* friends.

The next question that needs to be addressed is: For each of the five categories listed/discussed above, what are some *examples* of kind behavior. Given that the categories have been arranged in order of *intensity* of relationship—from those involving little or no personal contact to homosexual/heterosexual marriage (or its non-legal equivalent), one would (rightly!) expect that *the farther down the list, the more ways that kindness can be demonstrated*.

"Strangers" are usefully placed into two categories, (a) those with whom one *interacts* superficially (e.g., walks on the same sidewalk), but does *not* know personally (which, note, can include *quasi* strangers), and (b) those who one *learns about* via watching television, reading, etc., but also does not know *personally*.

In the first case, if one is careful in one's walking, but accidentally *brushes* another, one is only obliged to say "excuse me"—and leave it at that. Whereas with this *initial* case the person brushed was (tacitly) assumed to be in good health, and the slight brushing did him or her no harm, so that in saying "excuse me" one was demonstrating that one is a *courteous/polite/civil* person, the *second* case is very different—and for two reasons.

First, one's television-watching or reading is (a) being done in private (rather than in public), and (b) at one's leisure (rather than, e.g., while hurrying to work). Second, a *result* of one's reading or television watching may be *learning* about people who are starving, in desperate need of medical care, etc. In *this* case what kindness would involve is donating money to an organization serving the needs of, e.g., those who lack food, becoming a volunteer (to address local problems), etc.

At the other end of the spectrum, I note in my "[What is a Gentleman?](#)" (using the movie [Blast From the Past](#) as my source) that *friends* try to make each other feel *comfortable*. In addition,

they tend to do “favors” for one another, a form of kindness that usually requires little effort. For example, one may have tickets for the next Green Bay Packers game, but because one has other commitments, may not go to the game. One option would be to *sell* one’s tickets on, e.g., eBay (and perhaps receive even more than what one had paid for the tickets!). But if one has friends interested in football (doesn’t *everyone*?!), one will *solidify* one’s friendship with them by *giving* them the tickets—a *supreme* example of kindness! (If, on the other hand, one has tickets to a Chicago *Bears* game, Do I seem to have a bias?!)

So far as *acquaintances* are concerned, an excellent example [from the Bible](#) occurs to me, that of [gleaning](#):

Gleaning (formerly 'leasing') is the act of collecting leftover crops from farmers' fields after they have been commercially harvested or on fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest. Some ancient cultures promoted gleaning as an early form of a welfare system.

Whereas being *courteous* to others and making others (one’s friends in particular) feel *comfortable* are kindnesses that *primarily* have (positive) *psychological* implications for the other, note that gleaning is a practice that not only helps serve the *physical* needs of the other (i.e., the need for food for one’s sustenance), but also serves the other’s need to protect his or her sense of *self-respect*—and so has *psychological* implications as well. Thus, gleaning is a brilliant practice that “kills two birds with one stone”! It may not have been *consciously* developed with both physical and psychological considerations in mind, but the important fact is that it *does* both. (For a discussion of *modern* gleaning, see [this](#).)

When we come to friends and romantic partners, a *new* factor enters the picture. In both of these cases it is taken for granted that one *knows* the other rather thoroughly—although wives may have a tendency to be better at this than husbands! (As a married man, I *know* this to be true—just ask my wife!)

Knowing the other well implies that one’s *empathetic* abilities have been developed to a fairly high level, so that one not only has a high level of *general* knowledge about the other (i.e., is aware of the other’s *behavioral patterns*), but is able to “read” the other at any given moment. That is, by observing the other’s facial expression and body movements, one can make *accurate inferences* regarding *how* one might respond kindly (i.e., *properly*) to the other’s needs, whatever they might be. In other words, rather than following a set of previously-learned *rules* as to how one should respond to the other, one is able to *individualize* and *particularize* one’s response. That means, of course, that the *form* that one’s kindness takes *may differ substantially from one time to another*, relative to the other. Put another way, there is no *formula* to follow in responding to the other.

Nearly 50 years ago a song that was popular was “[What the World Needs Now is Love](#).” That message is as true now—perhaps more so!—as it has ever been. In fact, it should be obvious that the world would be a *far* better place to live in were that message to be taken seriously by

everyone—provided, that is, if what, e.g., kindness *entailed* were *understood* more thoroughly by more *people*.

Needless to say, our world has *never* been ruled by kindness. And that may be part of the reason why [John Davies wrote](#) last year: “The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.” If that happens, we will have to leave kindness to [other members of the animal kingdom](#), I guess!

Our Return to Feudalism

Alton C. Thompson

It has been said (in the *Gale Encyclopedia of U. S. History*) of colonial America that:

In colonial America, feudalism began as an extension of the English manorial system. In addition to the Puritans and the Protestants, who came from England to the New World seeking religious freedom, some early colonists came to expand their estates by establishing feudal domains. While the Puritans and the Protestants established colonies in New England, the Anglicans established the proprietary colonies of Maryland, the Carolinas, and Delaware, and the Dutch brought similar systems to New Amsterdam (later New York) and New Jersey. Similar systems came to the Americas in the seigneurial system of New France (Canada) and the *encomienda* system of the Spanish colonies of Latin America

“Feudalism” itself (so far as Western history is concerned) has been defined as:

the medieval model of government predating the birth of the modern nation-state. Feudal society is a military hierarchy in which a ruler or lord offers mounted fighters a fief (medieval beneficium), a unit of land to control in exchange for a military service. The individual who accepted this land became a vassal, and the man who granted the land become known as his liege or his lord. The deal was often sealed by swearing oaths on the Bible or on the relics of saints. Often this military service amounted to forty days' service each year in times of peace or indefinite service in times of war, but the actual terms of service and duties varied considerably on a case-by-case basis. Factors such as the quality of land, the skill of the fighter, local custom, and the financial status of the liege lord always played a part. For instance, in the late medieval period, this military service was often abandoned in preference for cash payment, or agreement to provide a certain number of men-at-arms or mounted knights for the lord's use.

And as to the so-called American “Revolution,” some have argued that:

in substance the American Revolution was no more than a group of Englishmen fighting on distant shores for traditionally English political rights against a government that had sought to exploit and tyrannize. According to this argument, it was a war of restitution and liberation, not revolution; the outcome, one set of political governors replacing another.

Relative to American history, one might argue that whatever “progress” has been made in moving away from feudalism in this country, for decades now we have been moving in a *feudalistic* direction—to the point that we are now a *full-blown* feudalistic society once again. The irony here is that although many of the “vassals” in today’s United States may *sense* their lowly state, the “lords” who control our society have, through their promotion of, e.g., “free

[market](#)” ideology and the [myth of “meritocracy,”](#) have gained such firm control over the *minds* of their vassals that the latter are unable fully to *recognize*, and thereby be able to *articulate*, their subservient status.

What seems to have “aided and abetted” their development, however, was “religion” in the form of Christianity. The early years of the “Jesus Movement” were characterized by considerable diversity (discussed, e.g., in Bart Ehrman’s [Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faith’s We Never Knew](#). [1]) “Christianity” arose, however, because [Emperor Constantine I](#) (“the Great”?) [272 – 337 CE] needed a “religion” that [would be politically useful](#) to him, and began to favor the Christian “religion.” Then, later in the fourth century, Emperor [Theodosius I](#) (also “the Great”?), via his [Edict of Thessalonica](#) (380 CE), made [Nicene Christianity](#) the official “religion” of the empire.

Two features of especial importance characterized Nicene Christianity:

- A hierarchical structure, consisting of many “layers,” which—partially through frightening congregants with threats of “eternal damnation,” partially (especially after 380) through the authority granted to its “officials”—enabled “religious” leaders to exert (as spokesmen for the Emperor!) control over congregants.
- An orientation to *belief* ([orthodoxy](#), in fact), rather than *behavior*.

Jesus, as portrayed in, e.g., the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), would have approved of *neither* of these features—which is why I refer to “Christianity” as a *parasitic* development relative to the early Jesus Movement—as, in fact, a *pseudo*-“religion”!

When the [Protestant Reformation](#) occurred centuries later (with several *denominations* emerging, and them, in turn, giving rise to still *more* denominations), the general tendency was for a “looser” structure (with different denominations having varying *degrees* of structure, of course), but an orientation to *belief* (over behavior) was continued—with each denomination developing its own particular creed/dogma (the “[Quakers](#)” being one notable exception).

In addition, the Protestant denominations that emerged tended to emphasize one’s *this*-worldly activities of an *economic* nature as constituting preparation for an *other*-worldly existence—which fact was given notable attention by [Max Weber](#) in his [The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism](#) (1905 – 1906), and [Richard H. Tawney](#) in [Religion and the Rise of Capitalism](#) (1926). There is a good basis for arguing, then, that:

- The “ethic” promulgated by certain of the early Protestant leaders ([John Calvin](#), and to a lesser degree [Martin Luther](#)) promoted (if but inadvertently) such values as [individualism](#), [2] greed, materialism, and selfishness, thereby conducting the development of [capitalism](#).

- As capitalism developed, because it gave the above-listed values “success value,” it helped *intensify* the development of those values in capitalistic societies.

Given the values (or lack of such!) associated with capitalism, along with the fact that the *household* is our basic societal unit, [3] it is not surprising that our society has become increasingly inegalitarian. Some have argued, however, that the development and growth of the *internet*—because it has given a *voice* to all those who have computers, and have purchased internet service—has been a “[leveling](#)” factor in our society—an argument that *does* have some measure of merit, I will admit (but not pursue here).

Among the important points made by Astra Taylor, in her recent [The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age](#) (2014), though, are the following:

- After posing a series of questions, such as is “utopia on the horizon or dystopia around the bend?,” she states (p. 6): “These questions are important, but the way they are *framed* tends to make technology too central, granting an agency to *tools* while sidestepping the thorny issue of the larger *social structures* in which we and our technologies are embedded.” (emphasis added)
- The (p. 6) “current obsession with the neurological repercussions of technology—what the Internet is doing to our brains, . . . whether Google is making us stupid This [sort of] focus ignores the *business* imperatives that accelerate media consumption and the market forces that encourage compulsive online engagement.” (emphasis added)
- Social media and memes (p. 7) “will remake reality—for better or for worse.” However, in Ms. Taylor’s view, “there is as much continuity as change in our new world, for good and for ill.”
- Many (p. 7) of the “problems that plagued our media system before the Internet was widely adopted have carried over into the digital domain—consolidation, centralization, and commercialization—and will continue to shape it.”

(Another extremely important subject addressed in her book is the loss of *privacy*, but I give no attention to that matter in this essay because of its lack of {major} relevance for the present essay.)

The economic—and political—power that accompanies the consolidation and centralization mentioned by Ms. Taylor has, in recent decades, been associated especially with the fossil fuel energy lobby, the Big Pharma lobby, and [AIPAC](#). However, in recent years Big Internet Media has been emerging as a major player on the lobbying scene. Ms. Taylor points out (p. 156), e.g., that “Google is now one of the top ten spenders in Washington.”

In her “Conclusion” chapter (pp. 214 – 232) Taylor makes a number of recommendations, such as:

- To (p. 216) “escape the cycle of churnalism [a term introduced by Nick Davies (p. 89)] and expendable content in favor of sustainable culture, we need to develop supports that allow for the prolonged immersion and engagement artistic and journalistic endeavors often require, nurturing projects that are timeless rather than timely.”
- The (p. 218) “shift to sustainable culture is possible, but implementing the necessary changes cannot fall to individuals and the marketplace alone. The solutions we need require collective, political action.”

I have two problems with her various recommendations, however:

- They are naïve from a *political* standpoint. That is, our society has become so inequalitarian—and is becoming *ever more* so—with wealthy individuals, corporations, and other organizations spending millions on “buying” politicians, it is virtually certain that *none* of her suggestions will ever be implemented. If wealthy individuals and organizations had an orientation to the [general welfare](#), their position of dominance in our society might at least be tolerable. But few individuals/organizations in that category “give a hoot” about the [public interest](#); as a (i.e., *one*) consequence, her proposals have as much of a chance of being implemented as a “snowball in Hell” has a chance of surviving!
- Like so many in our society, Ms. Taylor assumes, implicitly, that tomorrow will be much like today, the day after tomorrow likewise, etc. In making this (tacit) assumption, she fails to recognize—and address—one of the most important threats facing us humans at present, that of global warming (or “climate change,” [4] as some put it). True, she is aware (e.g., pp. 179 – 181) of some of the *environmental implications* of the new technology, but her grasp of those implications is rather limited.

For example, she shows no awareness of [the fact that](#):

One of the most frightening aspects of global warming, which few people realize, is that there's a time delay for the consequences of our actions to show up. The really catastrophic effects won't become obvious until it is too late to reverse them. The news media have been completely remiss in explaining this to the public. There are two key points about the science which everyone should know: lags, which delay and disguise the effects of our greenhouse gas emissions, and feedbacks, which magnify the effects when they do occur. Put these two effects together, and the science is clear that a "wait and see" approach to climate change is an invitation to disaster.

it takes very roughly [forty years*](#) from the time we increase CO2 levels for most of warming to occur in response to that extra CO2. [The asterisk (*) here is for an endnote that gives links to relevant literature.]

Now if *today's* weather conditions have their origins in what we humans did around **1974** (i.e., the 40-year lag referred to above), the question that I ask is: What will the weather situation be in, say, **2050**?! One scientist who has provided an answer to this question is John Davies, who in an [article posted last year](#) stated *as his very first line*!: “The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040.”

Professor Emeritus Guy McPherson, in commenting on that posting, [has said](#): “He [Davies] considers only atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration, not the many self-reinforcing feedback loops described below” [in Guy’s posting]. Indeed, in an [earlier posting](#) Prof. McPherson had said: “A decade ago, as I was editing a book on climate change, I realized we had triggered events likely to cause human extinction by 2030.”

These statements by Davies and McPherson are sobering, to say the least! What they suggest, however, is that:

- It may now be *too late* to do anything about global warming.
- If [geo-engineering measures](#) *are* introduced,
 - This may occur too late to be effective.
 - There is the possibility that if such measures *are* introduced, they will *exacerbate*, rather than *alleviate*, the problem. (Recall that [Al Gore has referred](#) to such measures as “insane”!)

The above is not calculated to give the reader any degree of comfort, but that’s not *my* fault! We have known about global warming as a potential threat since the late 1930s, thanks to [Guy Callendar](#), but our “leaders” (a misnomer if ever there was one!) have ignored the problem over the years—and it is likely now too late to “correct” this problem! [5] Given this, a good investment today (were it *legal*!) would be “life-termination” clinics à la [Soylent Green](#)!

In conclusion (and to return to my title), not only is our society becoming (once again!) a *feudal* society, but that fact [6] bodes ill not only for *our* future (as USans—i.e., citizens of the United States), but the future of the *species* of which we are members! Had Ms. Taylor *recognized* the fact that her book serves no useful purpose, it’s possible that she wouldn’t have written it. The same goes for *most* books/articles written these days!

Endnotes

1. As I regard “Christianity” as a parasitic development relative to the Jesus Movement, I dislike the word “Christianities” in his title. I also dislike his use of the word “Faith” in his subtitle, given that “faith” suggests an orientation to *belief*—something that came to characterize Christianity, but not the various strands of the early Jesus Movement.
2. The development of individualistic thought—relative to the political realm—was perhaps given especial impetus by the writings of [John Locke](#) [1632 – 1704].
3. In my “[Why Our Society Has Become So Inegalitarian](#)” I argue that the fact that the household is our basic societal unit helps explain why our society has been become so inegalitarian.
4. I dislike this term because as one who has studied [climatology](#), I tend to think of “climate” in terms of climate *maps*—e.g., a map of the classification system developed by [Wladimir Köppen](#) [1846 – 1940]. Thus, for me what “climate change” means is a shifting of climate type *boundaries* on a climate map—that’s not what’s primarily occurring at present. One of the “dimensions” of global warming is that atmospheric conditions, at any given location, are becoming increasingly *variable* from year to year—so that the very *concept* of “climate” is becoming increasingly meaningless. Put another way, the word “climate” is losing its *referent*.
5. Thirty years ago I published a [5-“wave” strategy](#) for bringing about societal system change—a strategy that, if it had been implemented, would mean that no global warming crisis would exist today. There would be no point in working to implement that strategy *today*, however, because the strategy’s “time has passed.”
6. One result of our increasing “feudalization” is that those who control *events* in our society are also able to control *minds*—in part by misinforming people, by encouraging people to focus on pointless diversions, etc. Thus, few in our society are aware of our current precarious situation as a species.

“Friends, Fellow Milwaukeeans, and (Other) Countrymen” [1]

Alton C. Thompson

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. [2]

[Edward O. Wilson](#) is one of the most notable scientists of our time. Currently University Research Professor Emeritus and Honorary Curator in [Entomology](#) at Harvard University, Prof. Wilson has been far more than a “bug” scientist (i.e., a student of insects). Author of numerous books, he has not only researched, and written about, [leafcutter ants](#), but also, e.g., [island biogeography](#), [population biology](#), [human nature](#), and the [future of life](#).

Just published is his [*A Window on Eternity: A Biologist’s Walk Through Gorongosa National Park*](#). [Gorongosa National Park](#) is located in Mozambique (in southeast Africa), and is not only the home to numerous species, but is also believed to be the general area from which [humans emerged](#). (I should perhaps add here that during (and for a period after) the [civil war](#) which began in Mozambique in 1977, a severe decimation of the species in this area occurred, but that significant restoration efforts have been occurring since that time.)

In this (rather short) book Wilson demonstrates his knowledge of insects and other species, and emphasizes the interrelationships that exist among the various species in the park—i.e., the *dependence* of a given species (such as ours!) on other species. The book contains a number of beautiful photographs by Piotr Naskrecki (who also happens to be {p. 93} “a leading authority on katydids, grasshoppers, and similar insects”)—the picture which most fascinated me being that of a baobab tree (p. 110) having a naturally-occurring lion’s head growing on its trunk.

The book makes the important point (p. xviii) that “Since the origin of life on Earth, about 3.5 billion years ago, 99 percent of those species that ever existed have come to an end [i.e., become extinct], to be replaced by other species.” And on the same page notes: “From the fossil record, scientists have found that mammalian species [which would include us humans!] enjoy an average longevity of only about half a million years, a relatively short period in the living world as a whole.”

Wilson rightly states (p. 126): “We should treat the living world as a magnificent garden.” And then follows up that statement by making the important point that (p. 137): “A very few societies have evolved to live inside biological reserves with a small footprint, carefully designed [but by the unconscious mind] to be sustainable. One is the Guarani people living in the northern Argentine state of Misiones. No species of plants and animals are known to have disappeared during their millennium-long residence [in that area.]” This fact suggesting that many, if not most, of the “primitive” (forager) societies that peopled Earth prior to the Agricultural

Revolution (of 10,000 years ago)—and including those *contemporary* “primitives” who we have not (yet!) killed off—had/have *sustainable* ways of life.

I should add that Chapter I (“The Clash of Insect Civilizations”) was especially a joy for me to read, because it’s obvious that Wilson is highly interested in its subject matter—social insects, and the intricate “colonies” (“superorganisms”) that some of them create—and his enthusiasm for the subject comes through “loud and clear” in his presentation. He says of insects (p. 75), “None to me is a [mere] bug. Each instead is one kind of insect, the legatee of an ancient history adapted to the natural world in its own special way. I wish that I had a hundred lifetimes to study them all.” (!) Wilson makes it supremely obvious in this chapter that his enthusiasm for studying “bugs” (sorry!) is boundless and sincere!

Finally, there is this interesting discussion (p. 89):

The driver ants enter houses, and the invasion is often welcomed by the inhabitants. The entrance, as [Thomas S.] Savage reported [in 1847], “is soon known by the simultaneous and universal movement of rats, mice, lizards, *Blapsidae* {beetles}, *Blattidae* {cockroaches}, and other vermin that infest our dwellings.” In time the ants move on, leaving a vermin-clear and otherwise undisturbed house. One need only wait outside for this service. (!) (Please note that I have used the { } symbols to indicate additions by Wilson, with [and] indicating insertions that I have made.)

The book also contains some humor:

- Wilson and some others had traveled to a location where a pride of lions had just been seen, and observed a pride consisting of a young male and three young females. All of a sudden (p. 101) “One of the females walks casually out of the copse, comes partway to the vehicle [in which they were sitting], defecates, and returns.” Wilson asked himself: “A gesture of contempt?”—which would seem to be a reasonable interpretation! But Wilson then answered his question by saying (p. 102) that he “didn’t think so.” (!)
- Later in the day Wilson and his companion (Gregory C. Carr—an {p. 2} “American businessman and philanthropist who has adopted the park and its fauna and flora as his lifetime mission”) observed (p. 102) an eagle struggling to lift a [black mamba](#) “and fly up and away with it.” Wilson then comments wryly: “This is a big adult, seven feet long as best we can estimate (no one volunteers to get out [of the vehicle] and make sure)” (!)
- “*Homo sapiens*, one of the biggest of all animals, is a species native to the African fauna. We originated there, and it is natural that we should be attracted to its dry forests and savannas and animals, the ones to which our ancestors were intimately connected throughout most of the last million years of [our] evolution. But the condition of walking

on two legs lifts our heads three to six feet above the ground, an immense distance from the tiny insects and other invertebrates that make up the bulk of animals in these ecosystems. So while we belong to such an environment by virtue of our deep genetic heritage, we are not [ironically!] built to be good naturalists. Our perceptions of this or any other wildland is intensely anthropocentric.” (pp. 121 – 122)

Despite the many merits of this book, I detect a number of problems with it—especially Wilson’s comments regarding evolution. In his Chapter Two (“Once There Were Giants” [3]) he gives a fine *brief* discussion of human evolution in its *temporal* and *geographical* dimensions, yet I also find problems with that chapter, and references to evolution that occur *elsewhere* in the book. As my criticisms relate to the hypothesis (it is *not* a theory!) of “natural selection” associated with [Charles Darwin](#) [1809 – 1882], my necessary starting point here is to discuss that concept—by first quoting what Darwin had to say about it. In discussing Darwin, I herein draw to some degree from my [Ringling the Bell for Darwin](#) (2012), Chapter 8 of that eBook in particular.

Darwin and Natural Selection

In presenting Darwin’s “definition” of “natural selection,” I have chosen to use the fifth edition [4] (published in 1869) of [The Origin of Species](#), because of its inclusion (for the first time) of a reference to [Herbert Spencer](#) [1820 - 1903] [5] in Chapter III (“Struggle for Existence”):

it may be asked, how is it that varieties, which I have called incipient species, become ultimately converted into good and distinct species, which in most cases obviously differ from each other far more than do the varieties of the same species? How do those groups of species, which constitute what are called distinct genera, and which differ from each other more than do the species of the same genus, arise? All these results, as we shall more fully see in the next chapter, follow from the struggle for life. Owing to this struggle, variations, however slight, and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man’s power of selection. But the expression often used by Mr. Herbert Spencer of the Survival of the Fittest is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient.

(In his Introduction Darwin had said:

In the next chapter [III] the Struggle for Existence amongst all organic beings throughout the world, which inevitably follows from the high geometrical ratio of their increase, will be treated of. This is the doctrine of Malthus [endnote 6], applied to the whole animal and vegetable

kingdoms. As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form.)

In “translating” Darwin here, let me quote from (p. 91) my *Ringling the Bell for Darwin* (to which I provided a link earlier), wherein I summarize (from his [One Long Argument](#), 1991) (the late—and long lived!) [Ernst Mayr’s](#) [1904 – 2005] “take” on Darwin’s hypothesis of natural selection (which I have “cut” from my *Ringling*, to maintain the format in *Ringling*):

First, Darwin began by recognizing three “facts”:

Fact 1. Populations tend to grow, and at an exponential rate.

Fact 2. (But) populations tend to remain stable in size.

Fact 3. There is a finite “carrying capacity” for a given species in a given area.

From these three “facts” Mayr claimed that Darwin derived:

Inference 1. A “struggle for existence among individuals” occurs. (Although Mayr did not clarify the meaning that he was giving “struggle for existence” let us assume that he meant to say that intra-specific competition occurs.)

Inference 2. There is differential survival; that is, some of those born die, others live—i.e., there is “natural selection.”

This second inference, according to Mayr, was drawn from Inference 1, along with Facts (4) and (5), which are as follows:

Fact 4. Each individual is unique (i.e., there is population variability).

Fact 5. Much of the individual variation is heritable.

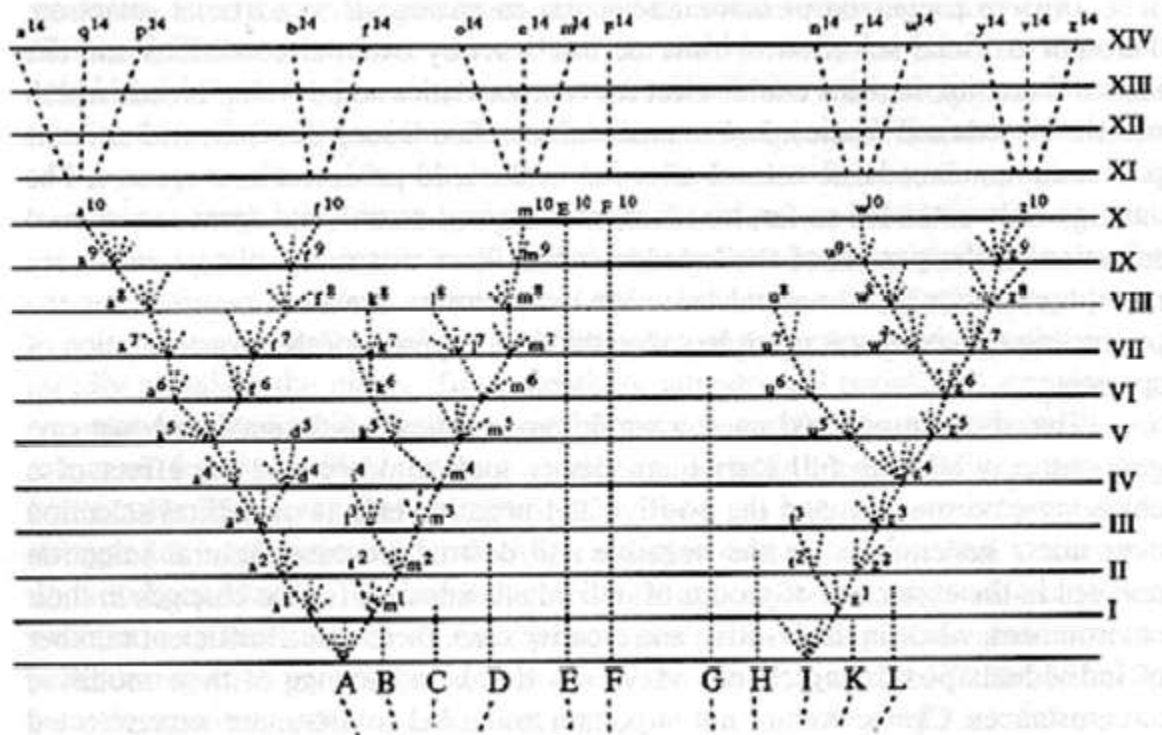
Inference 3. Over many generations the change is such that one can say that there has been [monotypic] evolution.

Note here a key interpretation of what *I* believe “struggle for existence” meant for Darwin (a matter not clarified by Mayr): Darwin was referring to *intra*-specific competition, not *inter*-specific completion. *One* reason for giving “struggle for existence” this interpretation is that if only *one* species were to exist in a given area (assume an isolated island), the carrying capacity of the island would act as an upper limit to the *size* of population (i.e., *number of individuals* of the given species) that could be supported. Given this, and given Darwin’s (tacit) assumption that societies are [atomistic](#), it follows that as the number of individuals increased, a point (in

terms of population size) would at some time be reached when *intra*-specific competition (for sustenance) would begin to occur.

The *survivors* of this competition would be those individuals that (a) *fit* the local environment, of course, but, in addition, (b) had *physical* (and perhaps *mental*) characteristics that enabled them to “win” in competition (for sustenance) with their conspecifics. Over time, those characteristics (and any other characteristics that happened to be *correlated* with them) would increase in presence within the group, by way of the passing of *inherited* characteristics to progeny, and there would therefore develop an *intensification* of the “winning” characteristics in the population—i.e., *monotypic* evolution (i.e., biological change in a *single* given species) would occur.

(I should perhaps add here that the only figure that appears in *Origin* depicts both monotypic and polytypic evolution ([source of figure](#)):



We can assume, with this figure, that the X axis (on which the A – L appear) depicts *changes*, with the Y axis depicting *time*. Thus, “dead-end” species D for some reason changes not at all (after the bottom unmarked horizontal line is reached, that is), and becomes extinct before time III. Species A *had* been changing prior to the time indicated by the unmarked horizontal line (i.e., monotypic evolution had been occurring), and then suddenly splits into *two separate* species (i.e., the beginning of *polytypic* evolution)—with further [speciation](#) occurring thereafter. Ironically, although natural selection (as I am interpreting it here) can yield *monotypic* evolution,

it cannot—in and of itself—yield *polytypic* evolution: Additional factors would need to be brought into the analysis to be able to explain polytypic evolution. Needless to say, Darwin did not distinguish these two types of evolution in *Origin*!)

A second—and more *substantial*—reason for concluding that Darwin’s natural selection was a “mechanism” *only* for monotypic evolution is that Darwin thought of natural selection as Nature’s equivalent of “*artificial* selection” (mentioned by Darwin in Chapter IV of *Origin*)—i.e., breeding. For what *breeding* involves is “artificially” bringing about biological changes in a **single given species**. This fact alone is **decisive in supporting my assertion that Darwin’s Natural Selection hypothesis refers to, and only to, change in a single species (i.e., monotypic evolution)**.

A *third* reason for concluding that Darwin’s natural selection was *only* a “mechanism” for bringing about monotypic evolution, lies in the *implications* associated with *other* “mechanisms” whose operations could affect a species—mechanisms which I am now required to identify and clarify:

Environmental Change: Just as the members of a given species will tend to fit the environment within which they live, so can environmental *change* be a factor causing *species* change. As the environment changes in a given area, one option that members of a given species have is to *migrate* to a different location. However, another option (basically the *only* one available to some species) is to remain at the existing location, and *adapt* to it (with those fitting the changing environment leaving progeny, and with those *progeny* that fit the environment surviving and having progeny, etc.—while those *not* fitting the environment die, with *their* genes then being lost from the gene pool.

Predation: Individuals living in a *group* have a better chance of surviving than isolates, because (a) predators are less likely to attack individuals living in a group (while *in* the group, that is) than isolates, and (b) members of a group (its *males* in particular) are likely to collectively *defend* the group against attackers, thereby discouraging attacks in the first place.

Sexual Selection: [7] I assume here *female choice* sexual selection in particular—that is, it is *females* that have the choice of which male(s) with which to mate, and therefore select as (temporary) partners that male (or those males) that exhibit traits that attract them. For example, females may choose to mate with a male(s) that provides her with (a) food and/or (b) protection.

Earlier I referred to “the *implications* associated with *other* “mechanisms” (such as environmental change, predation, and female-choice sexual selection), so the question arises: What *are* those implications—and what *conclusion(s)* can we draw from them?

1. With *environmental change* the species adapts to the environment—and no reason exists for *intra-specific* competition occurring (although there might be some reason for *inter-*

specific competition taking place—if, that is, other species present in the same area might be *competitors* for the same sustenance existing in the area).

2. With *predation*, by definition more than one species is present—the *prey* and one or more *predators*—and it is erroneous to refer to the interactions between prey and predator(s) as constituting *competition*. The prey species (the one of concern here) is likely to *change* (i.e., evolve, in terms of monotypic evolution) as a consequence of being preyed upon, with both physical and behavioral changes (both having a genetic basis, of course) being involved (the emergence of cooperative tendencies likely being among the *behavioral* changes).
3. *Female-choice sexual selection* is *also* likely to result in biological change with a species, and in the same manner as predation. In fact, assuming a prey species (such as humans), “mechanisms” (2) and (3) here are likely to produce (a) human *groups*, whose (b) *male* members act to obtain food (via hunting especially) for the group (with females engaging in plant gathering) and also act to *protect* the group from predators, and (c) with *all* members of the group exhibiting *cooperative* behavior (relative to in-group members)—not only because of an *inherited* tendency for such behavior, but because the young *learn* such behavior (both through *observing* their elders and being explicitly *taught* by them).

Because competition, properly understood, is not associated with *any* of the above-three “mechanisms, and Darwin clearly *did* associate competition with Natural Selection, it follows that when Darwin was referring to “competition,” he *had* to be referring to *intra-specific* competition. Therefore, we have an *additional* reason to “embrace” the interpretation that I gave to Natural Selection above (i.e., that it involves *intra-specific* competition).

The “nails in the coffin” of Darwin’s Natural Selection, however, are that:

- It’s highly unlikely that *empirically* Natural Selection, as defined by Darwin, played *any role whatsoever* in human evolution (!); that, rather
- It was the three “mechanisms” discussed *above* that played the *sole* role—so that to discuss human evolution, and argue that the one and only mechanism of change was, and has been, Natural Selection (i.e., intra-specific competition), is to “miss the boat” completely!

Returning once again to Wilson’s *A Window on Eternity*, I will now identify the major problems that I perceive in his book. Not that I wish to “bury” Wilson (to allude to my epigraph), of course: After all, although Wilson is aged (85 as of June 10), he is not yet dead! Rather, I simply want to note some of the problems that I have detected in his latest book.

Criticisms of Wilson's Book

1. Natural Selection *Per Se*

Today, Natural Selection is commonly thought of in a rather *confused*—and therefore *confusing*—way, as illustrated, e.g., by [this statement](#): “Natural selection can act on any [heritable](#) phenotypic trait, and selective pressure can be produced by any aspect of the environment, including [sexual selection](#) and [competition](#) with members of the same or other species.” For Darwin, Natural Selection:

- Did *not* involve *adaptation* (to the environment) [8] but, rather, Darwin *assumed* (if but tacitly) that a “fitting” of the environment *already* existed, and then went *beyond* that fact to explore the *implications* of *intra-specific* competition for a given (hypothetical) species.
- Involved one, and *only* one, “mechanism” (*intra-specific competition*)—with (monotypic) evolution being the result. *Sexual* selection was recognized by Darwin, but was thought of by him as something *different* from *Natural Selection* (even though it was perfectly “natural”!).

Here is [more typical modern definition of Natural Selection](#): “It is the process by which heritable [traits](#) that increase an organism’s chances of [survival](#) and [reproduction](#) are favoured than less beneficial [traits](#).” Note regarding this definition that although it makes reference to “process,” **it makes no reference whatsoever to “mechanisms” of change**—and specifically the three “mechanisms” that I discussed above. Unlike Darwin’s definition of Natural Selection, it is **bloodless**! Although Darwin’s hypothesis has little or no real-world relevance (!), at least it has the virtue of containing a *change* mechanism (i.e., *intra-specific competition*)!

Wilson uses the term “natural selection on, e.g., pp. 40, 41, 69, 117 (implicitly), 121 (implicitly), and 136 in *A Window on Eternity*. In doing so, he tends (with exceptions) to give the term the modern “bloodless”, mechanism-less meaning, yet (wrongly) attributes such a meaning to Darwin. I will admit that Darwin’s discussions are often unclear and “muddled,” but that is no excuse for a brilliant person such as E. O. Wilson *not* to be able to interpret Darwin correctly. *This*, then, is my *first* criticism of Wilson’s new book.

2. Glibness of Expression

Most—if not all!—of Wilson’s statements about evolution are glib, in that they make no reference to the mechanism(s) of change involved. Examples:

- “No later than 4.4 million years before the present, one of the species, *Ardipithecus ramidus*, developed [but *how?*] an anatomical innovation that was crucial for the changes that created humanity.” (p. 25)
- “And the pelvis was refashioned [*how?*] into a shallow bowl” (p. 25)
- “During this period, the brain size began to grow” [as a result of what *mechanism(s)?*] (p. 27)
- “So the insects have evolved [by means of what *mechanism?*] a simpler and more powerful method.” (p. 44)
- “Each instead is one kind of insect, the legatee of an ancient history adapted [via what *mechanism(s)?*] to the natural world” (p. 75)
- “It is genetically programmed self-organization” (What brought about this “programming”?) (p. 80)
- “Although the ants are blind (why waste energy making eyes if you are going to live shoulder to shoulder in a massed horde?),” (So the ants in question *chose* to be blind, to save energy?! Come on, now!) (p. 87)

3. Wilson and Mechanisms of Biological Change

In several passages Wilson displays an *awareness* of certain mechanisms of biological change, but fails to be *explicit* about the matter. Examples:

- “The evolutionary pathway to humanity was not a straight line. It was a crooked walk by a species through what can be usefully envisioned as an endless maze. As the environment changed, so did the ensembles of genes adapted to it.” (Here Wilson alludes to *environmental change* as a factor causing {monotypic} evolution, but fails to make clear that this factor is *one of the three* factors that have been involved in human evolution {along with other species}). (p. 22)
- “Millions of years of pursuit by lions and other carnivore sprinters had turned prey species into hundred-meter champions.” (The “turned” here is a result of the mechanism *predation* acting on the species, but predation is not identified as one of the mechanisms of biological change.) (p. 26)

- “It is reasonable to interpret this pattern of selective phobias—spiders but not ants or butterflies, and snakes but not eels—to be the consequence of evolution by natural selection. During millions of years of human prehistory, it has paid in a major Darwinian way to have quick, decisive response to the things that can kill you.” (Wilson’s use of the term “natural selection” and his reference to Darwin are inappropriate here, given that his discussion is concerned with a special case of predation: A case where the “predator” feels threatened, and strikes out, with the possibility of *killing* the threat—but not as its lunch. Perhaps a neologism is needed to refer to this possibility!) (p. 69)
- “To humans living out their lives in the still unspoiled parts of the African savanna it must seem that nature is at peace. It is in fact the opposite, a dynamic equilibrium built from ferocity.” (Wilson is referring here to *inter-specietal* interactions—i.e., the fact that some species are *prey* species, others are *predators*—but seems to imply—wrongly!—that “ferocity” also characterizes *intra*-species relationships.) (p. 89)
- “It is in the nature of things that not just prey but also predators live on the edge.” (Wilson is clearly referring here to predation as an important factor in (monotypic) evolution but fails to bring out—to *emphasize*—that fact.) (p. 118)

In summary, it is clear that Wilson is *aware* of some of the major factors responsible for human evolution—environmental change and predation—but (a) does not *explicitly* identify them, (b) evidently is unaware of (female-choice) sexual selection as a factor, and (c) insists on clinging, and giving credence, to a factor that **played no role whatsoever in human evolution**, natural selection (as defined by Darwin).

4. Naïve Comments on Global Warming

Wilson makes a few comments about global warming, all of them naïve. I will first quote the comments, and then address them:

- Providing (p. 53) “the long-term effects of climate change are not overwhelming, there is no reason to fear that the ecological cycle that worked for thousands of years in the past [in Gorongosa National Park] will not go on for thousands of years into the future.”
- To those (p. 132) “who feel content to let the [current] Anthropocene evolve into whatever destiny we are about to stumble on mindless, allow me to make a

modest suggestion. Don't stop, but please set aside the largest fraction of Earth's surface possible as inviolate nature reserves."

- Of course (p. 138), "for all ecosystems everywhere there is the reality of climate change. Even if existing reserves are protected at the needed level on a local basis, ongoing climate change will increasingly threaten the species within them."

Let me introduce my reactions to Wilsons's statements with these observations:

There is [the fact that](#):

One of the most frightening aspects of global warming, which few people realize, is that there's a time delay for the consequences of our actions to show up. The really catastrophic effects won't become obvious until it is too late to reverse them. The news media have been completely remiss in explaining this to the public. There are two key points about the science which everyone should know: lags, which delay and disguise the effects of our greenhouse gas emissions, and feedbacks, which magnify the effects when they do occur. Put these two effects together, and the science is clear that a "wait and see" approach to climate change is an invitation to disaster.

it takes very roughly [forty years*](#) from the time we increase CO2 levels for most of warming to occur in response to that extra CO2. [The asterisk (*) here is for an endnote that gives links to relevant literature.]

Now if *today's* weather conditions have their origins in what we humans did [9] around **1974** (i.e., the 40-year lag referred to above), the question that I ask is: What will the weather situation be in, say, **2050**?! One scientist who has provided an answer to this question is John Davies, who in an [article posted last year](#) stated *as his very first line*!:"The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040."

Professor Emeritus Guy McPherson, in commenting on that posting, [has said](#): "He [Davies] considers only atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration, not the many self-reinforcing feedback loops described below" [in Guy's posting]. Indeed, in an [earlier posting](#) Prof. McPherson had said: "A decade ago, as I was editing a book on climate change, I realized we had triggered events likely to cause human extinction by 2030."

These statements by Davies and McPherson are sobering, to say the least! What they suggest, however, is that:

- It may now be *too late* to do anything about global warming.
- If [geo-engineering measures](#) are introduced,

- This may occur *too late* to be effective,
- With the strong possibility that *if* such measures *are* introduced, they will *exacerbate*, rather than *alleviate*, the problem. (Recall that [Al Gore has referred](#) to such measures as “insane”!)

My comments relative to (successively) Prof. Wilson’s three points:

- The long-term effects of climate change *will* be overwhelming! I see no basis for believing *otherwise*!
- “Don’t stop” is utterly foolish advice!—given that even if we humans *would* stop (our polluting, etc.)—which will *not* happen!—it is (apparently) now too late to prevent “[runaway](#)” from occurring—thereby eventuating in our demise as a species.
- *Of course*, “ongoing climate change will increasingly threaten the species within them [i.e., reserves].”

5. Wilson on “Biodiversity Reserves”

In his final chapter (Chapter 11, “The Conservation of Eternity”) Wilson recommends the creation of biodiversity reserves, and asks (p. 131): “Can biodiversity reserves be maintained if people are given free access to them?” And a few pages later (p. 140) he recommends connecting “the reserves with one another to create wildland corridors.”

I have two problems with these recommendations:

- The likelihood that our political “leaders” (if they can be called that!) will “push” either of these two ideas—the reserves *per se*, and the corridors *connecting* them—is close to zero (i.e., 0)!
- Even if our “leaders,” in a “fit” of reasonability, *would* decide to try to implement Wilson’s recommendation, and actually *do* so, how would this *prevent* our species (along with many others) from becoming extinct within a few decades, if not years?! A rhetorical question, obviously!!

Needless to say, these are *serious* problems!!

Conclusions

In conclusion, this book makes some interesting points, and contains a number of beautiful photographs, but leads me to ask this (embarrassing!) question: From a “need to know” standpoint, what does this book tell me that I *need* to know?!

Endnotes

1. Forgive me, Bill (or do you prefer Will?) for borrowing from you!
2. Stated by Antony in William Shakespeare’s play [Julius Caesar](#), Act III, Scene 2.
3. The “giants” here alludes to an amusing “creation” story (of the local indigenous people) that Wilson recounts on p. 18.
4. The [first edition](#) was published in 1859.
5. Spencer, after reading Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, coined the phrase “[survival of the fittest](#),” and then used it in his 1864 [Principles of Biology](#). Darwin then chose to use the phrase in the fifth edition of *Origin*.
6. The reference here is to Rev. [Thomas Malthus](#) [1766 – 1834]. “Malthus became widely known for his theories about change in population. His [An Essay on the Principle of Population](#) observed [asserted, rather!] that sooner or later population will be checked by [famine](#) and [disease](#), leading to what is known as a [Malthusian catastrophe](#). He wrote in opposition to the popular view in 18th-century Europe that saw society as improving and in principle as perfectible.^[4] He thought that the dangers of [population growth](#) precluded progress towards a [utopian](#) society: ‘The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man’.^[5]”
7. The first part of Darwin’s Chapter IV (in *Origin*) discusses *natural* selection, the second part *sexual* selection. Thus, the latter is a “mechanism” that Darwin clearly *distinguished* from natural selection.
8. Thus, [the following definition of \(Darwinian\) Natural Selection](#) is *totally* misleading: “Natural selection is part of Darwin’s theory of evolution saying that those individuals within a species that don’t adapt well to their environment will eventually die off, while those that do adapt will continue on with future generations.”
9. That is, the “[greenhouse gases](#)” (such as carbon dioxide and methane) that we have emitted into the atmosphere, our deforestation activities, our activities that have resulted in the oceans becoming progressively more acidic, etc.

